MOLIÈRE

A BIOGRAPHY

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MOLIÈRE

A BIOGRAPHY

BY

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JoB

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

In writing this biography the aim has been to tell the story of Molière's life for English readers. With this in view, I have translated all the quoted passages, whether in prose or verse, using English heroic measure for the excerpts from Molière's versified plays. The French classic form is the Alexandrine rhymed couplet, a metre ill according with the genius of our language; hence it has seemed wiser to employ the blank verse measure of our own dramatic poetry rather than to attempt a rendering of Molière's rhymed hexameters in English. Manifestly it is impossible for such translations to retain the melodious rhythm of the original. My sole aim has been to suggest rather than convey the charm of Molière's imagery, and to embody the spirit rather than the letter of his verse. The student may find in the Appendix the quoted poetical passages in the original French.

As the intention has been to interpret Molière's life by his plays and his plays by his life, rather than to write an exhaustive criticism of his dramatic works, in the chapters devoted to the comedies more attention has been given to those concerned with his life than to pieces written mainly for stage purposes or to adorn some court festivity.

The titles of Molière's plays, as well as those by other authors of the period, have been translated, except when

a title is etymologically the same in both languages; as in the case of Corneille's *Andromède* or Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, in which instances the English equivalent alone has been used. The first time a play is mentioned, however, or when it becomes the subject of special comment, the French title is given in parenthesis. In all other cases the English translation is preferred, save in the rare instances when a title such as *Les Précieuses ridicules* is translatable only in a circumlocutory way. French rules of capitalisation differing from our own, the method adopted by MM. Despois and Mesnard in their edition of Molière's works has been used in the printing of French titles.

The bibliography contains the titles, authors, and, whenever possible, the original date of publication of the works consulted or quoted in the preparation of this volume. The authorities for important passages are given in the footnotes.

In nearly every case it has been possible to examine and compare the passages cited with the original authorities; but, being compelled by illness to leave France before the work was completed, here and there reliance has been placed upon the readings in the definitive edition of Molière's plays (*Œuvres de Molière, Collection des Grands Écrivains de la France*), the earlier volumes of which appeared under the editorship of M. Eugène Despois, the work after his death being carried to superb completion by M. Paul Mesnard.

The reader seeking original sources will find the principal of these in La Grange's famous *Registre;* in the preface to the edition of Molière's works edited by La Grange and Vinot and published in 1682; in Molière's biography by J.-L. le Gallois, known more generally as the

"Sieur de Grimarest"; in the biography attributed to Bruzen de la Martinière, and in the biographical sketches made by Perrault and Bayle. To these should be added the gossipy chronicles of Tallemant des Réaux, De Vizé, Loret, Robinet, Brossette, and other contemporaries of Molière, as well as two scurrilous libels written by the poet's enemies, details of which are fully set forth in Chapter II. When a few historical works, such as the histories of the French stage of the period by Chappuzeau and the Brothers Parfaict have been added, together with the invaluable documentary discoveries of Beffara, Jal, and Soulié, a fairly complete repository of knowledge regarding Molière has been catalogued.

Although there have been many modern French biographers of the poet since Taschereau, the first of them, the *Notice biographique* of M. Paul Mesnard (Vol. X, *Œuvres de Molière*) is by far the most scholarly and trustworthy; next in accuracy is M. Louis Moland's *La Vie de J.-B. P. Molière*, while from the human point of view M. Gustave Larroumet's *La Comédie de Molière* is decidedly the most interesting. Mention should be made, too, of the *Moliériste* magazine, so ably edited for ten years (1879–1889) by M. Georges Monval, the distinguished archivist of the Comédie Française and this same writer's *Chronologie Moliéresque*. *Le Théâtre français sous Louis XIV* by Eugène Despois is another work invaluable to students.

The reader wishing to pursue further the study of Molière in English will find Mr. Henry M. Trollope's *The Life of Molière* a painstaking and accurate work, and *Molière and his Times* by the Danish writer Karl Mantzius (English translation by Louise von Cossel), a pleasing and scholarly treatise upon the French stage of

the seventeenth century. A charming and accurate picture of the theatrical life of the period may be found in *Shakespeare in France* by his Excellency J. J. Jusserand, the present ambassador of France to the United States. Although no edition of Molière's plays at once satisfactory and complete has yet appeared in English, the translation by Miss Katherine Prescott Wormeley is decidedly the best.

A word upon the illustrations. Aided by M. Georges Monval, the artist, M. Jacques Onfroy de Bréville (JoB), has examined the original documents and plates contained in the archives of the Comédie Française, the Bibliothèque nationale, etc. Moreover, the costumes of the Comédie Française and the Théâtre de l'Odéon have been placed at his disposal. The famous arm-chair from Gély's barber shop at Pézenas, known as the *fauteuil de Molière*, and the interior of the shop have been reproduced in the illustration representing Molière in the rôle of amateur barber; while for the drawing in which he and the poet Bellocq are making the King's bed, the room of Louis XIV in the palace at Versailles having been altered considerably in 1701, the original architect's drawing in the Estampes nationales was used for the decorative features. In the sketch depicting Armande Béjart in Molière's room, the furniture and effects have been reproduced from the description given in the inventory of the poet's property made a few weeks after his death; in fact in every instance the artist has used the utmost care in making his illustrations historically exact.

Having been aided in the gathering of my material by the invaluable assistance of M. Jules Claretie, director of the Comédie Française, M. Léopold Mabilleau, director

of the Musée Social, M. Georges Monval, archivist of the Comédie Française and M. Truffier, a notable *sociétaire*, I wish to take this opportunity of thanking these distinguished Frenchmen for their courtesy. To Mr. Wallace Rice I am indebted for technical suggestions regarding the metrical translations; to Professor Crane I wish to express my gratitude for the encouragement and help he has extended me throughout the preparation of this work.

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR.

Lake Forest, Illinois,
July first, 1906.

INTRODUCTION

The Age of Louis the Fourteenth is attracting just now the attention of the "general reader" through the translation of memoirs and such brilliant historical monographs as Madame Barine's *Youth of la Grande Mademoiselle* and *Louis XIV. and la Grande Mademoiselle.* Society at Versailles and in the salon of the Hôtel de Rambouillet is fairly well known, and the visits of French actors to this country maintain a certain degree of acquaintance with the classical drama of the seventeenth century.

Interesting as is the political history of that period, its social and literary history is even more attractive and instructive. It was during this time that modern polite society was constituted and conversation raised to the level of an art. Literature, abandoning the slavish imitation of antiquity which characterised the sixteenth century, followed the models of Greece and Rome in a free and independent manner, and no matter how classical may be the form of this literature it is the exact reflection of the national spirit.

To understand this literature, then, we must bear in mind some of the characteristics of the monarchy under Louis the Fourteenth. That king, it is true, has quite erroneously received the entire credit for the literature and art developed in the previous reign under the enlightened patronage of Richelieu. Still, no great injus-

tice is done to Louis the Thirteenth or to Richelieu in attributing the glory of Corneille to the Age of Louis the Fourteenth. It was the latter monarch who settled the political and religious quarrels which had come down from his father's reign, and established the most absolute and unquestioned régime of modern times. Some of the results of this régime are the absence, until late in the reign, of political and religious discussion, and an attitude toward the person of the monarch little short of adoration. As society is excluded from intellectual activity involving politics and religious controversy, it is forced to direct its attention to itself and to examine its constituent parts. Never have there been such absorbing study of mankind and such profound knowledge of the human heart. The maxims of La Rochefoucauld resume the interminable discussions of the drawing-room upon the mainsprings of human action, and the interest of Corneille's dramas is largely an ethical one arising from the conflict of duty and inclination. The large and varied literature representing this tendency of the age will always preserve its universal interest, and Pascal, La Bruyère, and La Rochefoucauld belong to the literature of the world.

Next in interest is the dramatic literature of the period, which, with the exception of one author, finds with difficulty appreciation among English readers. It is usual to attribute the fact to the form of the French classical drama and to the failure of the attempt to naturalise this form in England. A French classical tragedy represents one action which takes place within twenty-four hours in one locality. The result of the compression of the action is that the French tragedy begins with the dénouement of the Shakespearean tragedy, for example; the result of the rule of the one locality is that

all events which do not occur in the prescribed spot, and there must necessarily be many such, have to be narrated and not represented. For this reason, and from the French fondness for declamation, monologues abound and check the feeble current of action. The outward form of the play, the Alexandrine verse of twelve syllables, with its obligatory pause at the sixth, and the couplets rhyming alternately in masculine and feminine rhyme (that is, with rhymes containing an *e* mute, and those which do not) seems monotonous and sing-song. In addition to all this, for reasons which cannot be given here, the subjects of French tragedy were, in the seventeenth century, taken exclusively from Bible (Old Testament) history or from Greek and Roman history and legend.

We often wonder how plays so artificial could have interested (and we know that they did) French audiences for so long a period. It must, however, always be remembered that, artificial as these plays were, they were instinct with the spirit of the times. The grandiose reign of Louis the Fourteenth found its expression in the sonorous verse and lofty sentiments of Corneille's heroes, while Racine reflected the gallantry of the age in his somewhat languishing Greeks and Romans. In the tragedies of both the characters spoke the artificial language of the day, and Molière himself, even when he was ridiculing this affectation, could not escape from it.

The limitations of French classical tragedy apply equally to the comedy of the seventeenth century, but not with the same injurious effects. The author is not confined to historical or quasi-historical, plots, but may invent or borrow plots to suit his purpose. He may also abandon the form of verse and employ prose, but he

will run the risk of offending the taste of his audience if he uses prose for anything but farce. Comedy, then, is a freer form, and, as it deals with ordinary mortals and not with kings or heroes, is of more universal interest than tragedy. Then, too, French comedy is not an exotic plant like classical tragedy, but is the regular development of elements as old as French literature itself. Between French classical tragedy and the serious drama of the middle ages lies the gulf of the Renaissance: the comic drama has an unbroken history. It required, however, a long series of efforts to raise the mediæval farce to the dignity of comedy and to free it from the influence of Italy. Here, again, the genius of Corneille made itself felt, and *Le Menteur* (1642) is as epoch-making as the *Cid* (1636).

For these and other reasons French comedy is more intelligible and attractive to the foreign reader than French tragedy, and the one great writer of comedy, Molière, has peculiar claims to his interest.

The fame of Molière, even in France, has overshadowed the glory of Corneille and Racine, and out of France Molière is now the only one of the great triumvirate familiar to those who are not students of French literature. There is in France and out of France a cult of Molière, just as there is a cult of Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Browning. The cause of this pre-eminence of Molière must be sought not only in his works but in his life.

The greatest dramatist of the modern world and the one whom the French would willingly place at his side were both actors as well as writers of plays, and so great is the glamour of the stage that Shakespeare and Molière are far more interesting characters to us than Marlowe or

Webster or Corneille or Racine. Of the two, Molière is in our minds the one more intimately associated with the stage. From the time he was twenty-one to the very day of his death in his fifty-first year he was acting constantly, and for nine years he was the husband of an actress. Of Shakespeare's career as an actor we know almost nothing, but from 1658 to 1673 we can follow Molière almost from day to day in his theatrical rôles. We have the description of his acting by his contemporaries and his own defence of his method. We possess even portraits of him in his serious and comic parts. Indeed, the story of Molière's life is largely the history of his company, and his comedies, on which his fame rests, were due to the exigencies of his position as manager. The publicity of the actor's profession is the greatest of its many disadvantages, and the man is usually lost in the player. This is the case with Molière, and we catch glimpses only of his private character.

But from whatever standpoint we regard it, the life of Molière was singularly interesting, and for fifteen years belongs almost to the public history of France. This life falls under three divisions: the first twenty-one years (1622–1643) of general education, and it is always well to remember that Molière enjoyed the best training of his times; the fifteen years (1643–1658) of apprenticeship to his profession, twelve of them spent as a wandering actor in the provinces; and the last fifteen years (1658–1673) of managerial success and literary glory in Paris. It is these fifty-one years of toil, discouragement, and fame which Mr. Chatfield-Taylor has undertaken to depict in the following work, and I may say, since these lines will not meet his eye until after publication, that I think he has accomplished his diffi-

cult task with singular success, and has given a vivid and correct picture of Molière the Man, the Actor, and the Dramatist.

The materials for these three phases of Molière's life are not equally profuse or important. There are gaps that we can fill only by the exercise of our imagination, — a dangerous factor in biography. We often lament our limited knowledge of Shakespeare's private life and character, although the materials for forming an impression of them are not so scanty as is generally supposed. We must remember that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the actor's profession was under a social ban, and it did not occur to Shakespeare's or Molière's contemporaries to preserve their memories as they did those of statesmen and warriors. Grimarest, the author of the first independent biography of Molière (1705), was criticised because "he had taken as much pains with his work as if it had been the life of a hero," and was taxed with ignorance of etiquette in calling Molière *Monsieur*, "a title which did not at all belong to him, as he was an actor, that is to say, a man of an ignoble profession." It is unfortunate that most of the personal details concerning Molière are due to his enemies, but when used with proper care they tell us much that is valuable and interesting about Molière's appearance and manner of acting, and even contain historical information which we should seek in vain elsewhere.

Still, as has already been said, there are in Molière's history unfortunate gaps that we cannot fill. We are not acquainted with the particulars of his early life and education; his first theatrical ventures are obscure; the long years spent in the provinces are known largely by civil and notarial documents establishing the presence of

Molière and his company in a certain locality at a certain date. After the final return to Paris in 1658 we are embarrassed by the profusion of materials, dealing, it is true, almost exclusively with the management of the company and the literary life so inseparably connected with it. With Monval's convenient chronology of Molière (*Chronologie Moliéresque*, Paris, 1897) in his hand, the reader can follow year by year the life of the great dramatist from his birth to his death, and woven in with it the synchronous social, political, and literary events of the period. To the student who knows thoroughly these three phases of the age such a chronological table might well be the most satisfactory life of Molière, but the "general reader" must have this knowledge supplied to him in a judicious form, and, above all, must have Molière brought for him into proper relations with his times.

This is no easy task for the biographer. He must retrace the history of the drama in order that we may understand the peculiar forms of Molière's plays and the *milieu* in which the actor lived. He must depict the society which Molière satirised and describe the literary movements of the day. The biographer will be tempted to lay undue stress upon some one of the phases of Molière's life according to his own tastes and interests. Molière the Man and Actor will be lost in the Dramatist, or will appear only as a figure in the history of the French stage. These seem to me the faults of the two most recent works devoted to Molière. One is overloaded with literary and financial details concerning the separate plays, the other conveys no idea of the personality of Molière.

The author of the present life of Molière has long

been a serious student of the French drama, and it is pleasant for the writer of these lines to recall the time when Mr. Chatfield-Taylor was his pupil at Cornell University in classes devoted to the study of French society and literature in the seventeenth century. Our biographer has been able to pursue this study since in the home of Molière and to collect everything of value relating to his subject. The result is a life of Molière both scholarly and popular, in which the man stands out vividly in the midst of his managerial and literary labours.

Mr. Chatfield-Taylor's book cannot fail to interest even the reader who knows no French, and should be an incentive to acquiring a knowledge at first hand of plays which are not particularly difficult to read in the original. This is certainly true of the plays in prose; the plays in verse are naturally more difficult, but they, or similar plays, are read by pupils in our schools after a year's study of French.

Prolonged study of the seventeenth century in France has impressed me more and more with its extraordinary social and literary interest, to say nothing of its picturesque political history. A great mass of memoirs and letters, many of them of the highest literary value, enable the reader to form a vivid idea of the period. Molière, above all, presents the most perfect picture of the society of the Age of Louis the Fourteenth in its various aspects. And this picture is ever fresh and attractive because its interest depends on the portrayal of the immutable passions of the human heart. The Miser, the Misanthrope, the Hypocrite, the Coxcomb, the Pedant, the Quack, the Parvenu, the Bore, the Coquette, are the same in all ages, and live in Molière's comedies

with a real personality that seems almost historical. Every form of society from the court to the cabin is unrolled before us on Molière's stage, and in the *Impromptu of Versailles* we are admitted behind the scenes of his theatre. By the performance of *Les Fâcheux* before the King and Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte (August 15, 1661) Molière is connected with one of the most picturesque events of the reign, — the fall of the great superintendent. That Molière's comedies are of present interest has lately been shown by Mr. Mansfield's fine performance of the *Misanthrope*. May we not hope to see him revive those characters which are so much in evidence at the present day, *The Nouveau Riche* (*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*) and The Club-Women (*Les Femmes savantes*).

From every point of view, then, Molière is worthy of our attention, and any work which will attract readers to him should be welcomed, especially if it is a readable and accurate account of the Man, his Times and his Work. Such, I am confident, is Mr. Chatfield-Taylor's book, and I am glad that the honour of producing such a work has fallen to an American writer.

T. F. CRANE.

Ithaca, New York,
July 20, 1906.

MOLIÈRE

I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

"WHAT great writer has most honoured my reign?" Louis XIV asked Boileau one day. "Molière, sire," the critic answered; but the King could not believe that a comedian who blackened his face daily to produce the moustache of Sganarelle was greater than Pascal, La Bruyère, La Fontaine, or La Rochefoucauld; greater than Bourdaloue, Fénelon, or Bossuet; greater, even, than Corneille, or Racine.

Others besides Louis XIV may take issue with Boileau, but none will deny Molière a place among the great writers of France of every age; and surely no one has arisen to challenge his supremacy in the sphere of comedy. To make a nation laugh through centuries is renown enough for any man.

No mere comic writer could have called forth Boileau's tribute. To be great in literature, a man must have a heart capable of intense joy and infinite sorrow, and from its depths must come thoughts shared by all mankind. Sympathy is a quality conferred by suffering; and because Molière suffered bitterly, his characters are living men and women, as true to-day as when they were drawn. To quote Voltaire: "He possessed a quality apart from Corneille, Racine, Boileau, and La

Fontaine. He was a philosopher in both theory and practice." The charm of his plays lies in their humanity; but to appreciate them fully, one must understand the man himself and the times in which he lived.

He was born somewhere in the heart of Paris in 1622. On the fifteenth of January of that year he was baptised in the parish church of St. Eustache, under the name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Molière being a pseudonym), and since it was customary to baptise children on the day of their coming into the world, this may have been the date of his birth as well. All his early life, however, is much shrouded in obscurity; and a wanderer in the streets of Paris may see two houses each bearing a tablet stating that it was built upon the site of the poet's birth. One is in the rue du Pont-Neuf (No. 31), and the misguided enthusiasts who placed a bust of Molière above its door in 1799, chose a spot where he never even dwelt and a date for his birth two years amiss (1620). The other, at the corner of the rue St. Honoré and the rue Sauval, formerly called the rue des Vieilles-Étuves, unquestionably stands upon the site of the house where he spent the years of his childhood. That he was born there is probable, but not certain. In 1633 Molière's father purchased another house under the arcades of the market-place. It was situated opposite the pillory, which stood a few steps from the church of St. Eustache; but this second house is of far less interest than the one in which the poet passed his childhood.

Of more importance, however, than his birthplace, are the times in which he lived and the influences surrounding him in his early years. He was Parisian born and bred, and he grew to manhood in the centre of the life of Paris — the Paris of Richelieu, a city of about five

hundred thousand souls huddled within walls which stood where the boulevards now teem with life. France, welded to a state by Henry IV, was being drilled in nationality by its cardinal martinet; religious wars had already rent the land, and the bickerings of the Fronde were to follow, before the monarch destined to be called *grand* should rule.

Molière's father, Jean Poquelin by name, and a scion of a family established at Beauvais as early as the fourteenth century, was a respectable upholsterer by royal appointment to the King (*valet de chambre tapissier du roi*). His shop in the rue St. Honoré, near the market-place, was within a stone's throw of the seats of the mighty. Standing in the doorway, young Jean-Baptiste might almost see Madame de Rambouillet in the window of her famous blue salon, or hear the fish-wives hawk their wares; and there, in middle class Paris, half-way between the great and the despised, he passed his boyhood among men and women whose types he was destined to immortalise.

Jean Poquelin, the elder, was a man of importance in the shopkeeping world. His father had likewise been an upholsterer, and his wife's father as well; so his business, as was customary in shopkeeping families, was inherited. His wife, Marie Cressé by name, brought him a comfortable dowry, and, being also a *tapissier du roi*, he had a certain function to fulfil at court. His younger brother, Nicolas, had held this appointment, but in 1631 resigned it in favour of the poet's father. Six years later, on December eighteenth, 1637, the reversion of the office was settled upon the future dramatist. There were eight of these royal upholsterers among the domestic officers of the King's household,

each receiving a salary of three hundred livres, for three months annual service at court; and it is easy to see that such an appointment would be sought by all well-to-do burghers of the upholsterer's craft.

Jean-Baptiste, the future Molière, was the first fruit of the marriage of Poquelin the upholsterer with Marie Cressé. Five other children followed, with the usual middle class regularity, and when the mother died in May, 1632, at the age of thirty-one, Jean-Baptiste, aged ten, Jean, aged eight, Nicolas, aged six, and Madeleine, aged five, survived her. His brothers and sisters had small part in Molière's life, and need no further mention; but it may be said, in passing, that Marie Cressé left an inheritance of five thousand livres to each of her children, and that, a year after her death (May 30, 1633), her husband married Catherine Fleurette, daughter of a bourgeois merchant. She died three years later, leaving two children — half sisters of Molière. So much for the bare family facts.

The Poquelin house in the rue St. Honoré, called the monkey pavilion (*le pavillon des singes*), was a bit of old Paris made curious, even in those times, by a corner-post carved to represent a band of pilfering monkeys climbing an orange tree to pluck the fruit; and by a suggestive coincidence, monkeys have occasionally appeared from very ancient times as symbols of comedy. The shop was on the ground floor, and behind it the kitchen, serving, probably, for a dining-room as well. Above was a loft, and over the shop an entresol in which were a bedroom and a closet. The first floor was used for storage; the room over the shop, looking out on the rue St. Honoré, was evidently the bedroom of Poquelin and his wife, and, possibly, the room in which Molière was born.

M. Eudore Soulié[1] gives a description of this apartment which deserves translation:

To see how this room looked and to form an idea of its occupants, one should visit the Hôtel de Cluny and the Louvre, and then read the inventory of Marie Cressé's effects, made at the time of her death. On each side of the fireplace with its brass andirons, were two small wooden seats called by the worthy housewives of the seventeenth century *caquetoires*. They were well worn by frequent use — there the women sat to gossip near the fire. In the centre of the room reposed a seven-legged walnut table, covered with green tapestry, *à rosette de Tournay;* and against the wall stood one of those old cabinets, now so rare, in which the most cherished bric-à-brac was kept. That of Marie Cressé was of walnut, with a marble top; it had four doors with lock and key, and was lined with Bruges satin. Against another wall lay a huge chest, covered with flowered silk tapestry and used to hold the family valuables. Along the walls were six high-backed upholstered chairs, and the bed, with its valance of lace-fringed Mouy serge and silk testers, was covered with a counterpane of ceremony. In the *ruelle*, or space beside the bed, was an armchair, kept for guests of honour — the doctor or the father confessor. Five pictures and a Venetian glass mirror hung against the walls, and the drapings of the Poquelin room were of Rouen tapestry.

Continuing, M. Soulié remarks that "the furniture was nothing extraordinary for the house of an upholsterer, but the rest of the family belongings surpassed in rather an unexpected manner the luxury, perhaps it would be better to say the comfort, of the bedroom."

An inventory of the family effects was made (January 19–31, 1633) after Marie Cressé's death, so we know

[1] *Recherches sur Molière.*

that M. Poquelin's clothes were of fine black or gray Spanish serge with gold buttons, and that his wife wore gowns of Neapolitan taffeta, gros-de-Naples, Florentine ratteen, or changeable watered silk, while her underclothes were of the finest linen. Marie Cressé had jewels enough to put many a modern duchess to shame, — bracelets, necklaces, pearl ear-rings, emeralds, and rubies, fourteen rings of diamonds and opals, and sufficient *bibelots* to stock a curiosity shop. The family had embroidered damask napery, too, and heavy table plate with gilt handles and feet, while the least of the housekeeping utensils was of silver. There can be no doubt that the Poquelins were well-to-do.

Had Jean-Baptiste been content to accept the lot of a successful shopkeeper, his only care need have been to learn his father's trade. But he was born with a turbulent heart, and that atmosphere of middle class respectability, with its smell of upholstery and glue, must have stifled him even in childhood. One day was like another. The shop must be opened and swept, the goods arranged to attract purchasers, orders filled, bills collected, and regular meals eaten in the kitchen. Yet even the narrowness of such a life was not unblessed. While watching his father's customers, young Poquelin learned to know the capricious ladies of the aristocracy, the *bourgeoises* who aped court manners, the fops, the uncouth burghers, and the rascally servants — in a word, the characters that he drew so inimitably.

His father, too, was such an object lesson in thrift and the strenuous stultification of wit that many writers have tried to identify him with Harpagon in Molière's play, *The Miser* (*L'Avare*). Undoubtedly, he was a close-fisted shopkeeper who counted pennies, or his business

would not have thrived; but he lavished upon his son the most liberal education that money could buy, and once endorsed a note to save him from a debtor's prison; so the stories that Molière was, at one time, an abused apprentice in a miser's shop, must be taken with reservations.

His mother, likewise, is a woman about whom little is known, except that her parents were well-to-do. At the time her will was drawn her dowry had increased considerably under thrifty management; and we know she brought six children into the world; while the books noted in the inventory of her effects — the Bible and a set of Plutarch — indicate that she had thoughts other than those of scrimping and child-bearing. There was so much tenderness in Molière's nature, sentiment so deep, that one likes to believe his mother was such a woman as he sought for in vain in after life.

Marie Cressé died when her eldest son had reached the age of ten. The years from eleven till fourteen were passed in another woman's leading strings; and it has been hinted that Catherine Fleurette, his father's second wife, was the original of Béline, the heartless, double-faced stepmother in *The Imaginary Invalid* (*Le Malade imaginaire*). Even dismissing this supposition as mere conjecture, the fact remains that young Poquelin fretted in parental harness. Such a lad as he could never be content in a sordid shop while the sun was shining on bright Paris; and it is safe to venture the guess that he played truant whenever chance offered, in order to roam about the streets.

Paris, at that time, was not the well paved, tree lined city of to-day, but a maze of tangled lanes. It was the Paris of D'Artagnan, where gilded coaches heralded by lackeys crowded passers-by against the house walls, while

the cardinal's musketeers fought for an unlucky throw of the dice, or, it might be, a lady's smile: the Paris of misery, too, where starving peasants trudged behind the panniers of overladen donkeys, and fifty thousand beggars dragged misshapen forms through ill smelling streets; where criminals languished in the stocks, or died in torture on the Place de Grève.

Around the corner from Jean Poquelin's shop lay the market-place, where the pillory stood and the cut-purse thrived; and there beneath the rambling arcades merchants in fine mantles chaffered to the click of the pewterer's hammer, while the market women cried their wares in the open square. But the Pont-Neuf, the main artery of Paris, must have delighted young Jean-Baptiste far more. While busy people came and went across this bridge, street singers trilled their ballads, poets recited pasquinades, quacks hawked opiates and drugs, clowns grimaced, and acrobats tumbled to gaping crowds. There, in that throng of artisans, students, valets, swashbucklers, grisettes, and wenches, he idled away many an hour; for, according to tradition, he acquired his first taste for comedy on the Pont-Neuf. Each quack had a troupe of mountebanks to draw him custom. The plays they gave upon their crude stages were screaming farces, with swaggering bullies or thieving servants as heroes, and wives who deceived their husbands as heroines; rough frameworks, or *canevas* as they were called, the actor's ready wit supplying the lines; and these may easily have served as models for Molière's earliest work.

The Pont-Neuf was not the worst of schools. Gaultier-Garguille, Turlupin, Guillot-Gorju, and Gros Guillaume, all famed comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, learned their art while serving as mountebanks for its quacks.

In Molière's time such *opérateurs* as Bary and L'Orviétan were the vogue, so the lad may have been among their ardent admirers; and, as his paternal grandfather owned two booths at the celebrated fair of St. Germain-des-Prés, another haunt of charlatans and mountebanks, he was doubtless a frequent spectator at the theatre of the fair as well.[1]

Grimarest's Life of Molière[2] having been used by Voltaire as a basis for his very inaccurate biography of *le grand comique*, as Frenchmen delight in calling their dramatic genius, it has ever since been the fashion to discredit that authority. However, as Grimarest's book was published only thirty-two years after Molière's death, when comrades, notably Baron, were still living, it seems only just to give him some degree of confidence — certainly in unrefuted stories like the following:

Molière had a grandfather who loved him distractedly; and, as this good man had a passion for the theatre, he often took little Poquelin to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. His father, fearing that such dissipation would spoil the child and divert his attention from his trade to other channels, asked the good man one day why he took his grandson to the play so often. "Do you wish," said he with much indignation, "to make him a comedian?" "May it please Heaven," the grandfather answered, "that

[1] Le Boulanger de Chalussay, in his comedy *Élomire hypocondre*, accuses Molière of having touted (*briguê*) Orviétan; but as this satirical play was intended as a malicious attack upon the poet, its statements should not be accepted without substantiation.

[2] *La Vie de M. de Molière* by J.-L. Le Gallois, sieur de Grimarest, 1705. This work is the first biography of the poet. Although far from trustworthy in the matter of absolute facts, its anecdotes are referred to so frequently in these pages that it has seemed unnecessary to burden the footnotes with repetitions of the title. In all other instances Grimarest's name in the text has been deemed sufficient reference.

he become as good a comedian as Bellerose!" (Bellerose being a famous actor of the day.) This reply made a deep impression upon the young man, and since he had no fixed inclination for the trade of upholsterer, it aroused a distaste for it in his heart. As his grandfather wished him to become an actor, he believed that he might aspire to something more congenial than his father's calling.

It will be seen that Grimarest fails to identify the grandparent responsible for so perverting the youthful mind; and, as Molière's paternal grandfather died in 1626, the tempter — if the story be in any way true — must have been the maternal grandfather, Louis Cressé; a supposition rendered more probable by the fact that the latter shared with Jean Poquelin, the elder, the executorship of Marie Cressé's estate, and was, in consequence, one of the guardians of the heirs, the Poquelin children. To take his grandson to the theatre occasionally would have been neither heinous nor unnatural. Even if Louis Cressé were not fully as culpable as Grimarest paints him, it does not need a far stretch of one's imagination to picture the future Molière standing beside him in the parterre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and gazing with open-eyed intentness at the ranting actors of the time, Bellerose and the famous Mondory, "than whom no man ever appeared with greater splendour on the stage." Besides, there was Gros Guillaume to make the child, father of the man, laugh till his little sides split; and, in the rôle of comic doctor, Guillot-Gorju, of huge peruke and pump like nose, to give him his first impression of the ridiculous side of medicine, his first distaste for the Faculty.

The reader who can recall the first act in M. Ed-

mond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* should have a fairly accurate impression of the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Molière's youth. Needless to say, it was the leading play-house of the capital. Its actors, glorying in the title of *Troupe royale des comédiens*, received a royal subsidy; and, unlike the tennis-court theatres of that period, this play-house occupied a spacious hall, and had a permanent stage and boxes. In the parterre, or pit, then entirely devoid of seats, a various rabble gathered,— lackeys, soldiers, artisans, shopkeepers, and impecunious gentlemen; and to keep the quarrelsome from interfering with the actors, the spectators were separated from the stage by a barrier at the height of a man's shoulder. Orange girls cried refreshments in the parterre, ladies of the court graced the boxes, men of fashion sat upon the stage; crudely painted back drops sufficed for the scenery, clusters of candles, suspended from the roof by a cord and pulley, gave the stage its light; in a box, fiddlers sat bowing wheezy violins; and the "dead heads" of the day — the King's musketeers — were so quick to draw their rapiers that riots were of frequent occurrence, and duels not unknown: such in brief was the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Its only rival, if rival it might be called, was the Théâtre du Marais in the old rue du Temple, a typical play-house of the time, situated in a vacant tennis-court, where D'Orgemont, husband of the great Turlupin's widow, was the principal actor. Of more importance to the student of Molière was the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, where a band of Italian buffoons held the boards, and Tiberio Fiurelli, whose stage name of Scaramouche is a word in many languages, was in his prime. There is a tradition that the transalpine player was a friend of

young Poquelin's and gave him lessons in acting. If this histrionic instruction were ever given, it seems most probable that it was after Molière's return to Paris from the provinces, in 1658; but the discussion of this may be left to a later chapter. That Molière profited by his observations of Italian mummery and play construction, is proved by his after work. Loitering occasionally in the crowds on the Pont-Neuf or standing beside his grandfather in the pit of the Hôtel de Bourgogne or the Petit Bourbon, his keen young mind doubtless received lasting impressions; yet he was obliged to spend too many years at school to have had much leisure for intimacy with buffoons and mountebanks.

Since the young nobles usually received their earlier education at home, the pupils of the primary schools were, for the most part, sons of the *bourgeoisie*. When Molière entered the Jesuit college of Clermont, early in his teens, he must have had previous training in books, and, if he held to the habit of his class, it was received at a primary school. In such an institution the life of the bourgeois boy was irksome to a degree. His costume was a simple uniform of coarse and sombre cloth, with a belt about the waist; his hair was never curled or perfumed, and, in place of the broad felt hat and jack boots of a nobleman's son, he wore a round cap and low cut shoes. Instruction in manly exercises was denied him and, likewise, a sword; his holidays were few, and he had but a single hour of play a week, with an extension in summer of another on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Obliged to speak Latin during such recesses, he was forbidden to quarrel or to strike a comrade, and his punishment varied only in the number of lashes administered by the whipping master, or the

length of time he might be condemned to a diet of bread and water.

Charles Sorel gives a picture of the schoolmasters of the time which should inspire deep sympathy for their pupils:

> They were men who came to the desk from the plough, preparing themselves as proctors in the school hours they stole from the service of their masters, or while their codfish sizzled over the fire. They contrived to become masters of arts with the consultation of few books; but they did not know what civility meant, and a lad in their charge must be born good and noble not to be corrupted.[1]

If Jean-Baptiste Poquelin was taught by such masters, he learned a few phases of human nature, to say the least; but when he entered the Jesuit college of Clermont (since called the college of Louis le Grand), in the rue St. Jacques, he was to be envied rather than pitied. Besides being the most fashionable school in the capital, it was also the best, and it brought him in contact with a superior class of boys, several of whom were to prove life long friends.

The Jesuits, long persecuted by the University of Paris, had been obliged to close their college for a number of years; but the King, at the petition of the nobility, reopened it by Royal Letters Patent in 1618, whereupon the young nobles and sons of the upper middle classes flocked thither in such numbers that Clermont soon outshone the University, its rival.

The course of study was devoted mainly to Latin classics: Cæsar, Sallust, Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, the poets

[1] *La Vraie histoire comique de Francion.*

from Horace to Juvenal; and, of far more importance to a future dramatist, the comedies of Plautus and Terence. Greek was taught less thoroughly; in the humanities, the pupils were given a taste, at least, of the best Athenian authors, possibly Sophocles, Æschylus, and Euripides; and, in all probability, Molière's familiarity with the classic drama was acquired while a student at Clermont. There was one feature in the life there which must have played a part in the development of his peculiar genius. Latin dramas were acted by the students; the professors, too, occasionally wrote original tragedies and comedies to be interpreted by their pupils; and, although no verifying record exists, it seems more than likely that Molière's first appearance as an actor was in that Jesuit theatre.

Because His Serene Highness, Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, brother of the great Condé, and a cousin of the King, became Molière's patron at a later day, he is reputed to have been his friend at school; but the royal scion was nearly eight years his junior, and was rushed through his humanities with such sycophantic speed by his masters that at Clermont he must have been a privileged character, holding aloof from common lads. When he came to school escorted by a retinue of flunkeys in peach-coloured liveries, Jean-Baptiste doubtless ridiculed him when he was not within earshot, and may even have been present when he read his thesis to Cardinal Mazarin from a dais eleven feet high; yet to imagine that this prince of the blood royal and an upholsterer's son were ever intimates is to trifle with probability.

About Molière's acquaintance with some fellow pupils of more congenial tastes less doubt exists. Claude Chapelle, natural son of Luillier, *maître des comptes*, and

a wit and dandy of society, and probably François Bernier, the great traveller and doctor to the Grand Mogul, together with the poet Hesnault, truest friend of Fouquet in the hour of his disgrace, formed, with young Poquelin, a coterie of kindred spirits. When Luillier, Chapelle's father, persuaded his friend Gassendi, the epicurean, to take his son as a pupil, Bernier, Hesnault, and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, were admitted to the philosopher's school as well. Soon that eccentric *Périgourdin* of tumid nose, Cyrano de Bergerac, also joined Gassendi's classes. The philosopher having been absent from Paris about seven years, returned in February, 1641, and in March was a guest of Luillier, an old time friend with whom he had once made a journey through Holland. During the previous year, De Bergerac, wounded at Arras and forced to leave the military service, developed a passion for philosophy; so 1641 is apparently the year when these five famous men studied with the epicurean.

"If Molière was a good humanist," says the preface to the first complete edition of his works (1682), "he became a still better philosopher; and his inclination for poetry made him read the poets with particular care, so he knew them thoroughly, above all, Terence." If such were his tastes he could have chosen no better master than Gassendi.

The philosopher was a lover of the beautiful, who believed that the lot of a man of letters was the best in the world. Gassendi had learned by heart a quantity of French and Latin verse which it was his habit to recite to his pupils while walking. "Beautiful poems learned and recited daily," he said, "elevate the mind, ennoble the style of those who write, and inspire grandiose sentiments." Lucretius was his favourite author, and the

effect of this epicurean poet upon his pupils is not difficult to trace. Hesnault[1] translated the invocation to Venus, and Molière paraphrased a passage on the blindness of love, which, years later, found a place in *The Misanthrope*. Chapelle, *le grand ivrogne du Marais*, as he was called, became the most epicurean of Gassendi's pupils, at least in the popular acceptance of the word; but Molière, although he led an actor's life, evinced, on more than one occasion, somewhat strenuous habits, and was decidedly more of a Cartesian than a follower of his early master's teachings.

Luillier was a good liver, who, together with his poet friends, Desbarreaux and Colletet, may readily have initiated his son Chapelle and comrades in the delights of epicureanism; and no doubt The Service and Fir Cone, The Lorraine Cross, and The Green Oak, all famous taverns of the day, rang to the laughter of these young lovers of the joys of life and verse. But whatever may have been the habits of his friends, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin's life was not entirely devoted to revelry, for, upon leaving Gassendi's classes, he made a pretence, at least, of studying law.

Le Boulanger de Chalussay[2] says that Molière took his licentiate degree in law at Orléans, "where any donkey could buy a diploma, but only went to the law courts once"; while the preface of 1682 states that "after leaving the law schools he chose the profession of comedian." In 1641 Molière was studying philosophy, while late in January, 1643, he had taken his first

[1] M. Paul Mesnard considers the evidence that Hesnault was a member of Gassendi's class too slight for acceptance; on the other hand, he presents no evidence to contradict a long established tradition.

[2] *Élomire hypocondre.*

step toward the stage; so his intervening law studies must have been more desultory than serious.

According to Grimarest, "when Molière finished his studies he was obliged, on account of his father's great age, to fulfil his duties as royal upholsterer for a while, and consequently made a journey to Narbonne in the suite of Louis XIII."

Molière's trip to Narbonne, although unverified, has never been disproved; but Grimarest's uncorroborated statements, being classed as mere traditions, have been held of doubtful authenticity; especially as Poquelin, the elder, far from being decrepit, was only forty-seven at the time. However, the upholsterer was occupied with business transactions in Paris while the King took his eventful journey (1642), and the reversion of the office of *valet de chambre tapissier* had already been settled upon his son; so the theory that young Poquelin filled his father's post on this occasion is based on more than mere conjecture.

If he accompanied the King through the South in an official capacity, Molière had opportunity to learn the flippant and servile ways of courtiers, their ambitions and jealousies, and to witness the futile but tragic end of a famous conspiracy.

On the twelfth of May, Cinq-Mars and De Thou were arrested at Narbonne for plotting Richelieu's death; and an attempt has even been made to identify the future dramatist with a young valet de chambre who tried to conceal Cinq-Mars in a closet and circumvent his pursuers. However, the proof that Molière played this humane rôle is quite as shadowy as the evidence that he lodged during this journey with one Melchior Dufort, a worthy bourgeois of Sigean, who at a later day is sup-

posed to have helped meet the financial difficulties of his strolling theatrical company.

If Molière at the age of twenty travelled in the King's suite, to be in the fashion he must have played the part of lover as well as courtier. Perhaps this was the case, since tradition would have it that during this journey in the South he met the strolling actress destined to lead him from the darkness of his middle class existence into the light of day. But this early love affair is so thoroughly a part of Molière's theatrical career that it must be related in connection with the story of his first appearance on the stage.

II

MADELEINE BÉJART AND THE ILLUSTRIOUS THEATRE

In telling Molière's love story one is in sore straits at the outset. That posterity might be interested in the doings of a mere actor certainly never occurred to him; for with the exception of his plays he has left no word to shed light upon himself. Besides a few contracts, wills, marriage licenses, and baptismal records, the only sources for a history of his private life are the occasional remarks of contemporary gossips, Grimarest's untrustworthy biography, and the slanders of enemies. Two of these last have almost attained the dignity of historical documents.

One is a satire by Le Boulanger de Chalussay, published in 1670, and entitled *Élomire Hypochondriac; or, The Doctors Avenged* (*Élomire hypocondre ou les médecins vengés*) — Élomire being an anagram of the word Molière, and the work a venomous comedy upon the poet's life. The other is a scandalous attack upon his wife in the form of a pamphlet called *The Famous Comédienne; or, The Story of La Guérin, formerly wife and widow of Molière* (*La Fameuse comédienne, ou histoire de la Guérin auparavant femme et veuve de Molière*). Guérin was the name of the actor Madame de Molière married for her second husband, and this libel upon her character, published fifteen years after the poet's death, was so abusive that the anony-

mous author was obliged to print it in a foreign country. In spite of documentary evidence to the contrary, the vile charges it contains have been accepted wholly or in part by the majority of Molière's biographers. Thus introduced, let the gossips and slanderers have their say.

"A fellow named Molière left the benches of the Sorbonne to follow Madeleine Béjart. He was long in love with her, gave advice to her troupe, joined it finally, and married her." Molière did love Madeleine Béjart, but he was not a student of the Sorbonne, and he did not marry her. However, when Tallemant des Réaux jotted down this bit of town talk in his *Historiettes* (a collection of gossipy tales written at the time, but not published until 1833), Molière was only an obscure actor; so the wonder is that his humble love story should have been found worthy of record at all. Now let the slanderer speak:

"Madeleine Béjart was the pastime of a number of young men of Languedoc," says the anonymous author of *The Famous Comédienne*. She was certainly in dalliance with one noble of the court, yet if all that libel says of her be true, it is strange that the name of only one lover besides Molière has been chronicled. How easily one young man of Languedoc might be magnified until he became "a number" in the eyes of a vilifier! But to pass over this unpleasant feature of her life, it is sufficient to say that she was the mistress of Esprit de Rémond de Mormoiron, Baron de Modène, a young nobleman of the county Venaissin and gentleman-in-waiting to the Duke of Orléans. She bore him a natural child, baptised on the eleventh of July, 1638, under the name of Françoise. The sponsors were Modène's legitimate son, Gaston, and Madeleine Béjart's own mother; while Jean-

Baptiste Tristan l'Hermite, a decayed gentleman-actor, whose daughter later became Modène's second wife, stood proxy for the eight-year-old godfather — leaving it certainly an inclusive family affair, and an interesting side light on the loose manners of the day.

Nor is this the only questionable baptism in the Béjart family. The parentage of Molière's wife, Armande Béjart, — Madeleine's sister or daughter, as the case may be, — is still a question for debate; but its discussion will be left to another chapter.

The date of Madeleine Béjart's birth, January eighth, 1618, is recorded in the parish of St. Paul; hence she was Molière's senior by four years. Her father, Joseph Béjart, Sieur de Belleville, was a petty court official with the untranslatable title of *Huissier audiencier à la grande maîtrise des eaux et forêts, siégeant à la table de marbre du palais.* He married Marie Hervé in this same parish of St. Paul on the sixth day of October, 1615, and she bore him eleven or twelve children, of whom only five were living when he died in the spring of 1643, — the year that Molière went upon the stage. All these surviving children were more or less connected with the poet's life. Joseph, the eldest, was twenty-six, possibly twenty-seven, years old at the time of his father's death; Madeleine was twenty-five; Geneviève, another sister, was probably about nineteen; and there was a brother, Louis, aged thirteen, as well as an unbaptised baby, — this last a fact to be remembered in the future discussion concerning Molière's wife.

The fortune of Joseph Béjart must have consisted solely in debts, for the widow took proceedings on March tenth, 1643, in the name of herself and children to abandon the right of inheritance. Perhaps it was this family

poverty which made the eldest son and daughter adopt the profession of the stage; for, like his sister, Joseph Béjart the younger was a strolling player.

Madeleine has been painted as a ne'er-do-weel who ran wild in the streets of Paris and finally joined a travelling theatrical company; yet all the evidence points to a time-filled, hard-working youth. Her father's position was honourable if not lucrative, while his brother held the office of *Procureur au châtelet*. Her family lived not far from the Hôtel de Bourgogne; and she had an uncle who, besides being a bailiff, managed a tennis-court, — in those days so nearly synonymous with theatre that she may be said to have passed her youth in a theatrical atmosphere.

She probably went upon the stage at seventeen; but she was the friend of Rotrou, the dramatist, herself wrote verses in his honour, and there is a tradition that one or two plays by her were performed in the provinces; so the idea that she was a child of the streets is certainly questionable. Le Boulanger de Chalussay says she had reddish hair; this in itself indicates temperament; but her reason for adopting a stage career was doubtless the inborn love of excitement and admiration which has inspired many an actress.

Whether from choice or necessity, Madeleine probably wandered through the provinces with a strolling company; and she may have played in Paris from time to time at some outlying theatre, since at eighteen she bought and occupied a small house in the Cul-de-sac de Thorigny. Rotrou, too, in the same year, 1636, published as dedication to his tragedy, *The Dying Hercules*, these verses by her:

Thy dying Hercules, in heaven or earth,
Brings glory to immortalise thy name;
And leaving here a temple to thy fame,
His pyre becomes an altar to thy birth.

No common wanton surely, this Madeleine Béjart, who could write verses to flatter the least susceptible great poet of the day! But Rotrou was not alone in thinking well of her attainments: Tallemant des Réaux wrote in his *Historiettes* that, "although he had not seen her, he understood she was the best actress of them all," — a tribute, indeed, considering that she never appeared at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Her protector, the Baron de Modène, was a restless dare-devil who played his part in half the conspiracies and intrigues of the time. His master, Gaston, Duke of Orléans, a brother of Louis XIII, spent his life in plotting, and his court was of the usual Orléans type, — a rendezvous for libertines and intriguers. Modène lived apart from his wife, and, when not fighting or conspiring or fleeing from justice, spent his time in revelry with his royal master; so he could hardly have been faithful either as lover or husband. Madeleine is supposed to have met this handsome, turbulent Lothario in Languedoc when he was an exile from court; and there is a story that he wooed her under a promise of marriage. In view of her later fidelity to the dramatist, this is not difficult to believe; for, with the exception of the attacks of libellers, there is not a word to indicate that she loved any one but Modène and Molière, and none that she ever bartered her charms.

She was a strolling actress in an age of license, it is true, and many were the nights she must have slept upon the straw of some barn or beneath the canopy of her

Thespian chariot. When she happened to please village bucks, they swarmed about her in the corner behind the stage where she dressed or besieged her quarters at the inn ; and it would be hard for a woman to remain modest and immaculate in such surroundings. When Molière first knew her, she was about twenty-five years old, and had seen much of the shadowy side of life. Surely it is not the only time an actress with a past has bewitched a callow youth of twenty.

The place of their meeting is still a mystery. Tradition would have it in Languedoc during the King's journey ; and because some comedians played before his Majesty when he stopped to take the waters at Montfrin, and a troupe headed by Charles Dufresne, an actor associated with Molière at a later date, appeared at Lyons the following year (1643), it has been argued that these organisations were identical, and Madeleine a member of them at the time.[1] If this be so, Montfrin was the place of her first meeting with Molière ; but the young man's journey itself is still a matter of doubt, so it seems quite as likely that they met first in Paris when she came from the provinces to set up her trestles in some vacant tennis-court.

If this conjecture be correct, in the company she brought with her from the country were her brother Joseph, who had a habit of stuttering even upon the stage, and probably an out-at-elbow gentleman named Jean-Baptiste Tristan l'Hermite, a brother of the poet François Tristan l'Hermite, and like him asserting descent from the gossip hangman of Louis XI. Modène, La Béjart's lover, played fast and loose with the wife of Jean-Baptiste,

[1] *M. de Modène : ses deux femmes et Madeleine Béjart,* by Henri Chardon.

and afterward married Madeleine l'Hermite, his daughter. Perhaps at the time Molière came upon the scene, Modène, already tiring of his love for Madeleine Béjart, had begun to be enamoured of L'Hermite's wife, known on the stage as Marie Courtin de la Dehors. This would tend to leave La Béjart at once resentful and fancy free; and if, as seems most likely, she was in financial straits, the budding passion of a young man who had just received an inheritance from his mother's estate might have appeared in the light of a godsend to such a girl. The one certainty, however, to be deduced from all this conjecture is that Madeleine Béjart met the future genius of comedy before June thirtieth, 1643, the date when he signed his first theatrical contract.

The actors of the time were vagabonds. The patronage of Richelieu had done something to improve their lot, and at his instigation the King had decreed that no aspersion should attach to the profession of player; but no royal decree could remove a deep-rooted prejudice. To a worthy bourgeois, such as Poquelin the upholsterer, a comedian was an outcast unworthy to be shrived; hence it took rare courage on Jean-Baptiste's part to cut himself loose from family and prospects.

When he decided to forsake the profession of the law for an actor's calling, he is reputed to have conceived a harebrained scheme which he hoped would lend respectability to his venture. Madeleine, the daughter of a court official, was as well born as he; and if they could surround themselves with a company of respectable amateurs — *gens de famille*, like themselves — they might elevate the stage by giving free performances in fashionable circles. The name of this venture was "The Illustrious Theatre" (*L'Illustre Théâtre*); undoubtedly an ill-starred theatrical

company bearing this title was organised by young Poquelin and the Béjarts; but whether the members gave amateur performances before appearing on the professional stage is still a matter of considerable doubt.

A somewhat questionable legend is told by Perrault[1] about a writing-master named George Pinel whom the upholsterer employed to dissuade his son from making a fool of himself. Instead of listening to righteous argument, the lad painted the charms of an actor's life in such glowing terms that the scrivener was himself persuaded to join "The Illustrious Theatre." As he succeeded in borrowing money from the worthy upholsterer both before and after espousing his son's cause, Pinel, if the story be true, must have been a pharisee as well as a scribe.

The facts of history relating to the organisation of "The Illustrious Theatre" are few. On the sixth of January, 1643, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin received from his father the sum of six hundred and thirty livres due from his mother's estate, and renounced his right of succession to the office of Royal Upholsterer. The decease of Madeleine's father about this time may have retarded the organisation of the company somewhat, since it was not until the thirtieth of June that its members were brought together to sign the contract which was to bind them to the venture.

This latter document contained a clause whereby Clerin, Poquelin, and Joseph Béjart should have the right to choose successively the rôle of hero in the plays to be produced, while to Mlle. Béjart was given the selection of the parts which pleased her. It set forth as well that the contracting parties united to play comedy and to

[1] *Les Hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siècle : avec leurs portraits au naturel.*

retain their organisation under the title of "The Illustrious Theatre." From these two clauses it has been argued that the troupe had given performances before the instrument was drawn, else its members would not wish to retain their organisation or entrust leading rôles to a young man without experience. But that is a question of minor importance. The signing of this contract marks the beginning of Molière's career as a professional actor. The document itself, discovered in a Parisian notary's office by M. Eudore Soulié, is authentic. The names of the following signatories occur in the eccentric spelling of the day:

Beys
Jean-Baptiste Poquelin
Bonnenfant
M. Beiart
Geneviefve Beiart
A. Mareschal
Françoise Lesguillon
G. Clerin
J. Béiart
George Pinel
Magdale Malingre
Catherine Desurlis
Marie Hervé

Duchesne.—Fieffé.

Although Beys wrote the initial of his Christian name as "D" to later documents of "The Illustrious Theatre," he was possibly the wine-bibbing Charles Beys, born in 1610, whose epitaph Loret wrote, and who was cited by the Brothers Parfaict[1] as the author of *The Madhouse* (*L'Hôpital des fous*) and other pieces.

Little is known of Germain Clerin. Joseph Béjart was Madeleine's eldest brother, while Geneviève was her younger sister, doubtless just beginning her theatrical career. Nicolas Bonnenfant was a lawyer's clerk, André Mareschal an advocate in parliament, and George Pinel the pharisaical scribe already mentioned. Catherine De-

[1] *Histoire du théâtre français.*

surlis, or de Surlis, was the eldest daughter of Étienne de Surlis, record clerk of the Privy Council of the King, and Françoise Lesguillon was her mother, who, as the actress was a minor, signed the contract to make it binding. Madeleine (or, as she wrote her name, Magdale) Malingre remained in the company only a short time, joining the forces of the Théâtre du Marais, where, according to Tallemant des Réaux, she fought a duel upon the stage with an actress named La Beaupré. Marie Hervé was the mother of the Béjart family. *Duchesne* and *Fieffé* were notaries.

In this document young Poquelin gave his address as the rue de Thorigny, where Madeleine had owned a house since her eighteenth year; so, although the lady discreetly gave her mother's residence in the rue de la Perle as her own domicile, it is evident that, without the benediction of the church, the young man had already joined his inamorata for better or for worse.

To complete his separation from middle-class respectability, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin chose a stage name, — a common practice among actors then as now, — but his reason for selecting "Molière" has ever remained a mystery. There was a ballet-master, poet, and musician attached to the court called Louis de Molier, or, as it was often written, Molière, and there had been an author, François de Molière, whose amorous novels had had quite a vogue. This François de Molière was dead. Possibly young Poquelin had been reading one of his books to his lady-love and liked the author's name.

But this is a question quite as unanswerable as whether love of art or love of a more tender nature made "a fellow named Molière leave the benches of the Sorbonne," or, to be more truthful, his father's house, "to follow

Madeleine Béjart." The blood runs warm at one-and-twenty, and in spite of his undoubted passion for the stage the lady's glances must have been more potent in turning the scales than "the invincible appeal of a noble art," which M. Paul Mesnard[1] cites as the cause of the youth's apostasy.

Once having taken this rash step, the young man must needs find a theatre for his madcap venture. Just beyond the walls of the city on the left bank of the Seine, stood a vacant hall called from the name of its proprietors the Mestayers' Tennis-Court. This was the place selected by Molière and his impecunious comrades for their enterprise. Situated in the *fossé* de Nesle,[2] it was remote from the haunts of fashion; yet the annual rental alone of nineteen hundred livres demanded by Noël Gallois, the tennis master, was fully three times Molière's capital, and the expense of transforming the place into a theatre was not included therein. The young man did not hesitate, however, to sign a three years' lease for this tennis-court, dated September twelfth, 1643, and since Marie Hervé hypothecated her goods, chattels, and house in the rue de la Perle as security, Molière's confidence in the enterprise seems to have been shared by her children, the Béjarts.

While the Mestayers' Tennis-Court was being transformed into a play-house, the members of "The Illustrious Theatre," together with Catherine Bourgeois, a new recruit, ventured forth to Rouen to try their fortune at a fair.[3] Engaging four "rascal fiddlers," who styled them-

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière.*

[2] Probably on the site now occupied by houses 10, 12, 14 in the rue Mazarin and 11, 13 rue de la Seine.

[3] *La Foire du pardon, ou de Saint Romain.*

selves "master players of instruments," to draw them custom, these unfledged actors set up their trestles near the gypsy tents and peddlers' booths of Normandy; there played to an audience of yokels, and made their bid for fame.

As the fair opened on October twenty-third, it is reasonable to presume the company had reached Rouen by that time. On November third, there the members signed a contract with Michault, a master-builder, and Duplessis, a carpenter, for alterations to their Paris house; so their presence in the cathedral city on that day is attested.

Corneille lived at Rouen, and his comedy, *The Liar* (*Le Menteur*), being somewhat in the vein of Molière's own earlier work, imaginative writers have pictured the master of comedy playing the part of Dorante at the time of his début. Unfortunately for the truth of this tribute of a future genius to one already laurel-crowned, Molière's early bent was tragedy, and at the time of his first appearance at Corneille's birthplace he was courting Melpomene with an ardour still unquenched.

Although the exact length of their sojourn among the merry-andrews of the West is not known, Molière and his fellow Thespians were certainly back in Paris on December twenty-eighth, for on that day the members of "The Illustrious Theatre" signed an obligation to pay Léonard Aubry, pavier in ordinary of the King's buildings, two hundred livres for a pavement twelve fathoms long by three wide before the new theatre. Aubry agreed, further, to widen the street so that coaches might reach the door, and that the work should be completed on the following Thursday, weather permitting. The twenty-eighth of December, 1643, falling upon a Monday, the Thursday following was the thirty-first. If the condi-

tions of the contract were fulfilled, the opening of "The Illustrious Theatre" probably took place on New Year's Day, 1644, one year less five days from the time Molière had received the sum of six hundred and thirty livres from his father and renounced his right of succession to the appointment of Royal Upholsterer.

The few whom curiosity attracted to the new playhouse went away to cavil. Even Madeleine Béjart's talent could not save the doomed enterprise. There is no sadder spectacle than a bad actor playing to an empty house; and in those days Molière was so bad an actor that in his efforts to curb the volubility of his speech, he acquired the habit of a sort of hiccough which lasted him through life; the houses he played to standing so empty that his patrimony was soon exhausted and debts contracted to the sum of two thousand livres. For a full year he and his fellow tragedians struggled on in the Mestayers' Tennis-Court; but the expected coaches never came, and the sumptuous boxes remained ungraced. True, they received the empty boon of styling themselves "The Troupe of His Royal Highness," probably through the intercession of Modène, but the Duke of Orléans was chary of his pensions, and the honour could not have been half so useful in drawing custom as the ballet-master named Daniel Mallet, engaged on June twenty-eighth, 1644, for thirty-five sous a day, with an additional five when he performed. The name *Molière* appears signed to the contract with this terpischorean artist for the first time, — Molière, at the nadir of his career.

The thought of a hired dancer doing steps as an antidotal interlude to the tragic bellowings of the genius of comedy would be pathetic if it were not humorous. For

tragedy was the undoing of "The Illustrious Theatre." Indeed the new play-house became a veritable morgue, where every poetaster in Paris exposed dead plays. *The Death of Seneca* and *The Death of Crispus*, by Tristan l'Hermite, *Scævola*, by Pierre du Ryer, and *Artaxerxes*, by Jean Magnon, were among the lugubrious pieces produced by these ingenuous actors; and, not content with turning their theatre into a mortuary, they admitted one Nicolas Desfontaines, already the author of eleven tragedies, to partnership.

No theatrical company could bear such a burden of the "heavy"; yet, actor-like, these crushed tragedians did not attribute their failure to lack of talent or choice of plays, but to the situation of their theatre. In December, 1644, when debt had driven them from their play-house, they rented another tennis-court called the Black Cross, over by the St. Paul gate, a far more aristocratic quarter then than the Faubourg St. Germain. Another master-builder was engaged to make the new house ready for occupancy on the eighth of January, 1645, and unless he was a trusting soul, Molière and his comrades had already received their windfall of cast-off garments to pawn for his remuneration.

Old clothes were no unusual reward for poets and actors who had pleased some great noble. Madeleine's former protector, the Baron de Modène, had become first gentleman-in-waiting to the Duke of Guise, and Tristan l'Hermite was attached to his household; so "The Illustrious Theatre" shared the wardrobe his Grace distributed among the actors of Paris about this time. In an anonymous collection of poetry, printed in 1646, occur these lines, evidently written by an actor the duke had overlooked:

Already, in the royal troupe,
Sir Beauchâteau, that popinjay,
Lets his impatient spirit droop,
Whene'er thy gift he can't display;
La Béjart, Beys, and Molière,
Three stars of brilliance quite as rare,
Through glory thine, have grown so vain
That envy makes me loudly swear
I 'll none of them, shouldst thou not deign
To grant me clothes as fine to wear.

Even a duke's cast-off garments could not avert "The Illustrious Theatre's" stalking doom. The receipts at the new play-house were no better than in the Faubourg St. Germain. At last came the hour of reckoning: Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, Sieur de Molière, having pawned two gold and silver embroidered ribbons, probably the remnants of De Guise's gift, was tried in July, 1645, and imprisoned in the Grand Châtelet early in the following month. A chandler named Antoine Fausser had pressed a claim for a debt of a hundred and forty-two livres; and, having gone security for the ill-fated company, Molière was placed in a debtor's cell. On the fifth of August the civil lieutenant, Dreux d'Aubry, ordered him set at liberty upon his own recognisances, but one François Pommier, acting for other creditors, demanded that he be reincarcerated, and a linen-draper named Dubourg obtained a decree of arrest.

The chief of "The Illustrious Theatre" was thereupon again imprisoned; but his friends rallied to his support, and Léonard Aubry, who paved the street before the Mestayers' Tennis-Court for the carriages which never came, went upon his bond.

When the young actor was released, his comrades gathered in the Black Cross Tennis-Court, August thir-

teenth, 1645, and agreed to indemnify his benefactor; but the ranks of "The Illustrious Theatre" had been sadly shattered. The company no longer styled itself "The Troupe of His Royal Highness," and of the original members, Molière, the Béjarts, and Germain Clerin alone remained loyal. Catherine Bourgeois and Germain Rabel, later recruits, signed the obligation to the pavier, thus swelling the total of the depleted ranks to seven Thespians all told; but the honourable intentions of these wretched vagabonds were beyond their powers of fulfilment. When the obligation to Léonard Aubry fell due, December twenty-fourth, 1646, Molière's father, so frequently maligned as the original of Harpagon the miser, came to the relief of his wayward son by endorsing the note, — surely not the least of the upholsterer's good acts.

This ends the story of "The Illustrious Theatre." Madeleine Béjart's faith in her young lover was still unshaken, but Paris would have none of them; so the undaunted pair went forth to seek their fortune in the provinces. The temptation to return to his father's house must have been very strong, but Molière's belief in himself was still the confidence of youth, — the glow in the heart that lessens only with the years.

III

THE COMEDIANS OF THE DUKE OF ÉPERNON

When Molière fled from Paris, he became, in the phrase of the theatre, a "barn-stormer." An ox-cart was his home, his play-house some vacant grange or tennis-court. Eventually he obtained a following in certain towns, and recognition as an official entertainer in at least two provinces; yet for nearly thirteen years he was at best a vagabond, tramping the highroads of France beside his unwinged chariot. Court records, the registration of infants born to his actresses, and entries in a few provincial ledgers of payments made to his company are the only recorded facts relating to the first eight years of his wanderings; so in order that the story may be told at all, it becomes necessary to shed a dim light of circumstantial evidence upon that darkest period of his life.

Only the Béjarts — Madeleine, Joseph, and Geneviève — are known to have accompanied him in his flight from Paris, and he was of so little importance, even in the theatrical world, that no record of his departure has been preserved.

Catherine Bourgeois, as a member of "The Illustrious Theatre," had paid her share of that hapless venture's obligation to François Pommier on the fourth of November, 1646, and during the following month Jean Poquelin, senior, had endorsed his son's note to Léonard Aubry, the pavier, to tide over "The Illustrious Theatre's" misfor-

tunes. From this it may be argued that Molière lingered in Paris until the end of the year 1646; though sixteen months intervened between the agreement of the shattered company to indemnify Léonard Aubry and the date when Molière's father came to its relief, without any record of intermediate financial difficulties. Catherine Bourgeois's settlement was manifestly her own affair, and it would have been possible for Molière to arrange his business with his father by correspondence, or even to take a flying trip to Paris; therefore it is far easier to believe that he fled to the provinces shortly after his second escape from prison than that he was able to dodge both bailiffs and gaolers from August thirteenth, 1645, to December twenty-fourth, 1646.

M. Mesnard[1] enhances the value of this theory that the chief of "The Illustrious Theatre" left Paris in 1645 by quoting from the memoirs of a contemporary named Tralage, to the effect that the "Sieur de Molière began to play comedy at Bordeaux in 1644 or 1645." It was impossible for the poet to have reached the capital of Guyenne until after his escape from the Châtelet in August, 1645; but if he left Paris then, he might have reached Bordeaux long before the end of that year. The Duke of Épernon was governor of Guyenne at the time, and, according to Tralage, "he esteemed Molière, who appeared to him to possess considerable wit."

There is other evidence to indicate that Molière and his company reached Guyenne before December, 1646. During the autumn of that year Jean Magnon, whose tragedy of *Artaxerxes* had been played by "The Illustrious Theatre" preliminary to its downfall, published a tragi-comedy called *Jehosophat*. In the preface, he took

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière.*

occasion to thank the Duke of Épernon for "the protection and assistance he had given the most unfortunate and one of the most deserving of French actresses." Madeleine Béjart was undoubtedly most unfortunate at the time this was written, and, considering Magnon's connection with "The Illustrious Theatre," it is reasonable to suppose she was the actress the Duke of Épernon befriended. Again, in April of that same year (1646), A. Mareschal, another former comrade, likewise dedicated a tragedy called *Papirius; or, The Roman Dictator* to the Duke of Épernon, and, in his preface, refers to the troupe his Grace had "enriched by magnificent presents as much as by illustrious actors." [1]

Thus Tralage mentions Molière as having pleased the Duke of Épernon, while Magnon calls attention to an unfortunate actress he had befriended, and Mareschal to his "illustrious actors." Piecing together this fragmentary evidence, it is fair to presume that Molière, together with Madeleine Béjart and the remnants of "The Illustrious Theatre," left Paris before the publication of either *Jehosophat* or *The Roman Dictator*, and that the Duke of Épernon extended them his patronage.

It was customary for travelling companies to organise at Easter, so that the spring of 1646 seems a probable date for the departure from Paris. On the other hand, if Molière fled from the capital immediately after his escape from prison, he reached Bordeaux before the end of the year, which would accord with Tralage's statement that he was there in 1644 or 1645.

Of far more human interest, however, than the date of his departure for the provinces is the fact that he had

[1] *M. de Modène: ses deux femmes et Madeleine Béjart*, by Henri Chardon.

the pluck to persevere in his chosen calling. Overwhelmed by discouragement and disgraced by a debtor's cell, his most natural course would have been to re-enact the story of the prodigal's return; but rather than acknowledge defeat, he became an outcast denied even the right of Christian burial. In those days the strolling player was beset by want and persecution, while the unsettled state of French politics added the danger of highway robbery to the certainty of police oppression. Courage and perseverance are qualities which distinguish genius from mere cleverness, and when Molière turned his back upon the joys of Paris to lead a life of privation and social ostracism, he proved the quality of his fibre.

The best existing picture of life in a travelling theatrical company, at the time when Molière took to the highroads of France, is in Scarron's *Comic Romance* (*Le Roman comique*), a story of the trials, tribulations, and amours of a band of strolling players, told with true picaresque humour and gaiety. It was evidently inspired by some travelling company which the worldly abbé met while attending the general chapter of St. Julien at Le Mans in 1646, and as Molière and La Béjart bear a vague resemblance to the hero and heroine, more than one attempt has been made to prove that he had them particularly in mind. But other theatrical companies were tramping the highroads at the time, and M. Chardon,[1] who has studied the matter exhaustively, comes to the conclusion that Molière was not the hero. The opening paragraph of Scarron's story might pass, however, for a picture of Madeleine Béjart and her young lover at the time they were forced to storm the barns of provincial France:

[1] *La Troupe du Roman comique dévoilée.*

Between five and six in the afternoon a van entered the market-place of Le Mans. It was drawn by four lean oxen led by a brood mare, whose colt scampered back and forth about the vehicle like the little fool it was. The bags, trunks, and long rolls of painted cloth which filled the chariot formed a sort of pyramid upon the apex of which sat a young girl whose country garments were relieved by a touch of city finery. A young man, poor in dress but rich in countenance, tramped beside the van. . . . Upon his shoulder he carried a blunderbuss which had served to assassinate a number of magpies, jays, and crows. These made him a cross-belt, from which a chicken and a gosling, evidently captured in desultory warfare, hung by the legs.

This ox-cart described by Scarron was typical of Molière's own chariot of Thespis. When it halted at the end of a day's journey, village urchins greeted it with jeers; and while the footsore actors who had tramped behind its creaking wheels argued with some swaggering archer of police for permission to set up their trestles, village rakes with feathered hats against their breasts besieged the tired actresses, sitting huddled on its pile of baggage, with offers of gallantry and ribald compliment.

The strolling player found manifold trials awaiting him on every hand; bandits infested the highroads, the police were merely authorised brigands, and so great was the prejudice against his calling in certain localities that a tatterdemalion mob armed with stones sometimes greeted him at the end of a day's journey. Even in more hospitable regions, he was forced to seek an official permit to present his comedies, and for some vacant grange or tennis-court to serve him for a play-house. A few deals laid upon wooden trestles were the veritable

"boards" he trod; and as his theatre was frequently a barn, the term "barn-stormer" is no misnomer. If his company were affluent, it might boast a roll or two of canvas daubed to represent a street or palace; but his scenery was more likely to be merely a pair of travel-stained curtains which rumpled the hair of his tragedy queen as she made her haughty entrance. His lights were only tallow dips stuck by their own grease on a pair of crossed laths; his orchestra, a drum, a trumpet, and a pair of squeaking fiddles; while in costuming and "make-up" he did not attempt historical accuracy; a tawdry toga and a plumed helmet sufficed for the classic heroes of both Greece and Rome; a clown's dress or swashbuckler's cloak for comedy parts. For the buffoon, he whitened his face with flour and pencilled grotesque moustaches on his lips with charcoal; but nature herself was usually the "make-up artist."

An official permit obtained and his theatre ready, the manager of a strolling company must then secure an audience. This was no simple matter. His drum-beats gathered a crowd; and by an harangue on the marvels of his actors he endeavoured to extract sufficient coppers from the pockets of his yokel auditors to keep out of the bailiff's hands. To feed a dozen mouths when five sous was the price of admission was a task to appal even the most aspiring heart.

Happy the comedians who obtained a governor's patronage! Official thorns were removed from their path, their coffers filled from the public exchequer, presents and favours bestowed upon them; so, in befriending "the most unfortunate and one of the most deserving of French actresses," the Duke of Épernon spared the

remnants of "The Illustrious Theatre" many a supperless night, many a pallet of straw.

"Our troupe is as complete as that of the Prince of Orange, or of his Highness of Épernon," said one of the characters in *The Comic Romance.* Molière's portion of this divided compliment was due, no doubt, to the eventual union of his company with the troupe of Charles Dufresne, a comedian who appeared in Lyons as early as 1643. The date when the two organisations joined forces is still uncertain, but it is quite likely that Molière, when he reached Guyenne, found Dufresne already in the governor's favour, and, through Madeleine Béjart's influence, was invited to join his ranks.

An acknowledgment for five hundred livres paid "The Comedians of the Duke of Épernon" by the town authorities of Albi in October, 1647, contains the names of Dufresne, Pierre Rebelhon, and René Berthelot. Rebelhon, or Reveillon as he is usually called, played with Molière in the provinces, while Dufresne, as well as Berthelot, a fat comedian known on the stage as Du Parc and nicknamed Gros-René, were in the company he brought to Paris in 1658. As the Béjarts and Molière are not mentioned in this document, it is uncertain whether the two companies were yet united; but on May eighteenth of the following year (1648), Dufresne, Du Parc, Marie Hervé, and Madeleine Béjart stood sponsors at Nantes for Reveillon's daughter.

Molière was also in Brittany near this time; for, according to the municipal records of Nantes, "The Sieur Morlierre (*sic*), one of the comedians of the troupe of the Sieur Dufresne," appeared before the civic authorities on April twenty-third, "humbly to beg permission to erect a stage and present comedies," — a petition refused until

the Maréchal de la Meilleraye, governor of the province, had recovered from an illness. On May seventeenth, Dufresne alone conferred with the aforesaid city fathers about a performance which was to be given for charity on the following day, while on June ninth he signed a document pertaining to the lease of a tennis-court at Fontenay-le-Comte; so apparently he, and not Molière, was the manager of "The Duke of Épernon's Comedians." Being a man of greater experience, it was but natural for him to assume the leadership until his comrade's genius asserted itself in no unmistakable way. This did not occur until after the company reached Lyons; meantime the future poet, while serving his apprenticeship in stagecraft, was acquiring much in the way of worldly knowledge.

A writer who has never studied in the school of emotion will find himself ill-equipped for the portrayal of human nature; so perhaps of even more value to Molière than stage experience was his experience with the sex. He had flaunted himself out of his father's house because he was in love with a pretty actress, but he found it quite another matter to remain in love with her throughout the years he spent in ox-carts, barns, and hostelries. When the scales had fallen from his eyes, Madeleine Béjart appeared in her true light, — a clever actress and a good comrade, yet a woman older than himself, and one whose life was not above reproach. She, on the other hand, knowing his nature thoroughly, was ready to pardon his lesser faults because of her implicit faith in his abounding genius. His failure to realise that she was the one above all others suited to be his helpmate was undoubtedly a weakness in his character; but remember he shared with her the countless hardships of a strolling player's life.

Though a vagabond, he could never forget he had been born above his station. His writings and his unfortunate choice of a wife prove that he possessed a distinct ideal of womanhood Madeleine Béjart could not fulfil. Nevertheless, his conduct during those years of wandering, if his slanderers are to be believed, was none too scrupulous. According to the author of *The Famous Comédienne:*

When the troupe arrived at Lyons, they met another company in which were two actresses named Du Parc and De Brie. Molière was at first charmed by the former's good looks, but the lady, hoping for a more brilliant conquest, treated him so disdainfully that he was obliged to turn his affections toward De Brie. She received him with no such coldness, and, unable to avoid her, he engaged her in his company, together with Du Parc.

This story from the pen of a slanderer need not be accepted in its entirety. On January tenth, 1650, Molière and Catherine du Rosé (or Rozet) stood sponsors for a child baptised at Narbonne, while on February nineteenth, 1653, the poet witnessed Du Parc's marriage at Lyons with Marquise Thérèse de Gorla. Catherine du Rosé was the stage name of Catherine Leclerc, who married Edme Villiquin, a surly member of Molière's company called Sieur de Brie. After her marriage, she became known as Mlle. de Brie. Likewise Marquise Thérèse de Gorla (Marquise being a name, not a title), after marrying Du Parc (Gros-René), adopted her fat husband's name, and is consequently the actress referred to above as Du Parc. These being the first authentic dates regarding either lady, De Brie, rather than her rival, would seem to have the benefit of historic priority.

Since both these actresses played a considerable part in the poet's life, a word regarding them may not be without interest. De Brie was a tall, graceful blonde,[1] who appeared in tragedy and higher class comedy. In marked contrast, Du Parc, the daughter of an Italian charlatan, was a stately brunette, who played second tragedy parts and possessed a natural talent for dancing in "a skirt so split down the sides that her legs and part of her thighs could be seen." In spite of her great beauty and wonderful pirouetting, such an acknowledged critic as Boileau found Du Parc a mediocre actress; but she had the distinction of being admired by the four greatest geniuses of the century — Molière at Lyons in 1653, Corneille at Rouen in 1658, La Fontaine and Racine at Paris in 1664.

To chronicle all the meagre details of the poet's early wanderings would be to record a tedious list of documents and dates unearthed from time to time by some ardent *Molièriste*. Bordeaux, Albi Nantes, Toulouse, Carcassonne, Agen, Limoges, Narbonne, and Pézenas are towns where some trace of him still remains, and on April fourteenth, 1651, he was in Paris in connection with the settlement of his mother's estate.

The rebellion of the Fronde broke out in 1648; soon the Duke of Épernon was at war with the inhabitants of Bordeaux; bands of marauding soldiers made travelling dangerous, a livelihood more difficult to gain. At Nantes, a troupe of marionettes proved a successful competitor, and there is a tradition that Molière's reception at Limoges was so hostile that the poet's antipathy for

[1] Grimarest quotes a friend of Molière's as speaking of La de —— (evidently De Brie) as plain and "a skeleton"; but this is manifest malice.

the place rankled in his heart until twenty years later he wrote *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* in revenge; but up to the time he reached Lyons there is little to distinguish his life from that of any other strolling player of the day.

The time of his arrival at the capital of ancient Gaul, as well as the date of the production of *The Blunderer; or, The Mishaps* (*L'Etourdi ou les Contretemps*), his first successful comedy in verse, has never been conclusively settled. Grimarest, however, is emphatic on the latter point. "Molière and his troupe," he says, "were loudly applauded in Lyons in 1653, where he presented *The Blunderer*"; and the preface of 1682 likewise states that "Molière came to Lyons in 1653 and there gave to the public his first comedy, called *The Blunderer*." Such twofold evidence would appear convincing were it not for a direct contradiction to the effect that "this piece was presented for the first time at Lyons in the year 1655."

This latter quotation is from La Grange's famous *Register* (*Registre de la Grange*). La Grange was an actor who joined Molière at Paris in 1658. From the time he became a member of the company until his death, he kept a minute account of its receipts and disbursements, with the dates and titles of the plays produced. So emphatic a statement by him as the foregoing cannot be passed by without consideration. La Grange was known in real life as Charles Varlet; in 1672 he married Marie Ragueneau, formerly Mlle. de Brie's maid, but then a character actress in Molière's company. This lady's father was Cyprien Ragueneau de l'Estang, the pastry-cook poet, made familiar to present-day readers by Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. To escape his creditors, Ragueneau fled from Paris and became a

strolling player, but hopeless alike as pastry-cook, poet, and comedian, he fell once more in the artistic scale and ended his life in 1654 as *moucheur*, or candle snuffer, to a Lyons play-house.[1]

La Grange, Ragueneau's son-in-law, would seem, at first sight, to have been in a position to know the truth regarding Molière's various peregrinations to Lyons, but before accepting his statement that *The Blunderer* was not produced until 1655, it is well to remember that he did not enter the company until 1658, nor marry Mlle. Ragueneau until eighteen years after her father's death. He was somewhat confused in regard to the date of Molière's own marriage, an event which took place under his very eyes; so to believe that he made a mistake in recording a play produced five years before he was a member of the "Troupe de Molière," requires no great exercise of one's credulity.

There is other evidence that La Grange was in error. An interesting document has been unearthed in the library of the Count of Pont-de-Veyle, which sheds light upon the date of Molière's advent in Lyons. Written in a time-worn hand, evidently of the period, the following distribution of parts was found in a copy of an early edition of Corneille's *Andromeda:*

[1] In the last act of Rostand's play, Ragueneau appears as a *moucheur* at a Paris play-house, and tells the dying Cyrano that Molière has pilfered a scene from his farce *The Tricked Pedant* (*Le Pédant joué*). It is true that the scene referred to is found in Molière's *Rascalities of Scapin* (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*), but Ragueneau died at Lyons in 1654, and De Bergerac at Paris in 1655, while Molière did not return to the capital until 1658 and his farce was not played until 1671. To paint Ragueneau as a candle snuffer in Paris at the time this piece was produced, and likewise as a witness of De Bergerac's demise a year after his own death, is justifiable only by a very broad poetic license.

Jupiter	Du Parc
Juno, and Andromeda	Mlle. Béjart
Neptune	De Brie
Mercury, and a page of Phineus	L'Éguisé (Louis Béjart)
The Sun, and Timanthes	Béjart (Joseph)
Venus, Cymodocia, and Aglanthia	Mlle. de Brie
Melpomene, and Cephalus	Mlle. Hervé (Geneviève Béjart)
Æolus, and Ammon	Vauselle
Ephyra	Mlle. Menou
Cydippe, and Liriope	Mlle. Magdelon
The Eight Winds	Supernumeraries
Cepheus	Dufresne
Cassiopeia	Mlle. Vauselle
Phineus	Chasteauneuf
Perseus	Molière
Chorus of the people	Lestang

L'Éguisé, meaning "the sharp-tongued," was the nickname of Louis Béjart, Madeleine's younger brother, aged twenty-three or thereabouts, who had probably made his début several years previously. Chasteauneuf was an actor who again became associated with Molière at a later day; and Vauselle is the stage name of Jean-Baptiste l'Hermite, whose wife, Mlle. Vauselle — or Marie Courtin de la Dehors — supplanted Madeleine Béjart in the affections of Monsieur de Modène, and whose daughter, Madeleine l'Hermite, became the second wife of that inconstant nobleman. Mlle. Menou is a lady to whom there will be occasion to refer in a later chapter; but of most moment, now, is Lestang, none other than the bankrupt pastry-cook Ragueneau, reduced to playing the humble chorus of the people under a stage name. The addition of all these players to "The Duke of Épernon's Comedians" indicates that *Andromeda* was performed by this cast in some large town, and the

presence of Ragueneau would point to it as being Lyons.

Molière may have reached that city as early as 1651, when he is supposed to have visited an academician named Boissat at the neighbouring town of Vienne; his presence there on December nineteenth, 1652, when Reveillon stood sponsor for a child, is indicated strongly; on February nineteenth, 1653, when he himself witnessed the marriage of Gros-René and Marquise de Gorla, it is assured.

A vagabond poet named D'Assoucy, who spent three months at Lyons in 1655, failed to embellish his eccentric memoirs[1] by any account of so momentous an event as his actor friend's first success in comedy; and as Ragueneau died on August eighteenth, 1654, both *Andromeda* and *The Blunderer* were, in all probability, played in Lyons in 1653.

Far easier to decipher than the date of Molière's first appearance at Lyons is the reason for his advent there. During the rebellion of the Fronde "The Duke of Épernon's Comedians," an experienced company with a repertory of standard plays, were forced by their patron's political misdeeds and consequent unpopularity to leave Guyenne and seek a new field. In all that pertained to the production of plays, Molière had become the directing spirit, while Madeleine Béjart kept an eye on the finances. Dufresne, an old stager already known at Lyons, was still the nominal head of the organisation, and, confident that in the capital of ancient Gaul lay their best chance of fortune, he directed the steps of his comrades thither.

[1] *Les Aventures de Monsieur d'Assoucy.*

Caravans from Germany, Provence, and Italy filled the streets of Lyons then, and transalpine merchants bartered for the product of her looms. Jews from Lombardy and Frankfort drove bargains in bills of exchange; but, of far more import to Molière and his comrades, Lyons was the haunt of the poet and exquisite, — the provincial Mecca of the strolling player. There many new plays were produced, and a theatrical success won upon the Lyons stage was little short of a Parisian triumph. When the poet made his first hit before an audience of critical *Lyonnais* with a comedy in verse, he ceased to be an unknown "barn-stormer"; indeed, the outburst of genuine laughter which greeted *The Blunderer* has reechoed through the centuries; nevertheless, the story of that first triumph must give place for the moment to a word upon Molière's earlier dramatic work.

IV

EARLY DRAMATIC EFFORTS

A TRAGEDY called *The Thebaïd* (*La Thébaïde*) — supposedly played at Bordeaux in 1646 — has been invented, without corroborative proof, as Molière's first play. This fanciful effort of our poet's youth has also been acclaimed the inspiration of Racine's tragedy of the same name; but certainly until the production of *The Blunderer* the truth concerning Molière's work as a dramatist is overshadowed by imagination. In all probability his first piece was never written at all — a paradox inspired by the nature of the roaring farces he had seen played in his youth.

Even the best of these were given so empirically as an antidote for tragedy that they found no place in the literary pharmacopœia of the day; for, as has been noted in a previous chapter, such farces were bare outlines to which the actor's wit applied the dialogue. Used as afterpieces at the Hôtel de Bourgogne or as drawing cards for prating quacks, they were but Italian *scenarii* adapted to French usage, while the *farceur* himself remained the servile imitator of the Italian buffoon.

The action was developed in a single act, and to permit the player to suit the humour of his audience, prose was the vehicle employed. Verse being the medium of both tragedy and comedy, farce consequently was with-

out the literary pale, and about the time Molière fled from Paris it was banished altogether from established play-houses. Until he made the King laugh with a farce from his own pen, this coarse form of merriment was confined to the booths of quack doctors or the barns and tennis-courts of provincial France.

Needless to say that pieces intended to amuse an audience of yokels in an age of license, were distinguished by neither refinement nor finesse. They have been aptly described as composed of "imbecile old men, young libertines, women of every kind — except the good, two or three disguises, three or four surprises, combats, and tumults." As the earliest of Molière's existing farces were much in the vein of these buffooneries, his first attempt at play-making was probably an unwritten dose of humour administered by "The Duke of Épernon's Comedians" to drive away the melancholy resulting from some turgid drama.

Although a great poet and a still greater philosopher, Molière was considered a *farceur* by his contemporaries, — a crime in him that Boileau never pardoned. He began and ended his life work with farce; whenever he forsook this form of construction it was to gratify his King or to unburden his own heart. Because of a genius for jugglery, or rather an unerring skill in painting human nature, his deft hand often made farce appear in the guise of character comedy; but when the most popular of his plays are analysed — plays with characters so human as Harpagon the miser, Monsieur Jourdain the socially ambitious parvenu, and Argan the hypochondriac — they are found to be farces in construction, traceable to Italian, Spanish, or classical sources.

This is not said by way of reproach. Molière boasted

that "he took possession of his property wherever found,"[1] and literary grave robbery was then a petty offence. Indeed, in all literary justice, every author who embalms a stolen body and dresses it so gorgeously in garments of his own creation that it is mistaken for an idol should receive a high priest's homage, not a desecrator's malediction. Molière did even more: he created French comedy from the dust of Menander and Plautus, breathing into it the spirit of Italian mummery.

Finding himself a member of a strolling company sorely in need of farces, and having a better education than his comrades, he began their manufacture. Naturally he turned for his models to those seen in his youth, — the Italian *scenarii* of the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, the *canevas* of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Pont-Neuf. *Gros-René: A School-boy* (*Gros-René: écolier*), *The Three Rival Doctors* (*Les Trois docteurs rivaux*), *The Schoolmaster* (*Le Maître d'école*), *Gorgibus in the Bag* (*Gorgibus dans le sac*), *The Fagot Gatherer* (*Le Fagotier*), *The Physician in Love* (*Le Docteur amoureux*), *Gros-René's Jealousy* (*La Jalousie du Gros-René*), and *The Cassock* (*La Casaque*) are the titles of *canevas* attributed to Molière; but the only examples of this form of work which have been preserved are *The Jealousy of Smutty Face* (*La Jalousie du barbouillé*) and *The Flying Physician* (*Le Médecin volant*). These two early attempts, both of uncertain date, are as crude as their author's models, and unworthy of notice except as forming the stepping-stones of a genius toward fame.

The Jealousy of Smutty Face, suggestive of a story by Boccaccio, but probably taken by Molière from some Italian *scenario*, is merely a jumble in one act of broad

[1] See note, page 351.

humour with little variety of scene or story. A wife's father and a pedant intervene in a matrimonial squabble in a comic but inconclusive way, and the closing speech, "Let's all take supper together," shows the tenor of this bit of aimless fun. The character of the pedant is noteworthy as heralding the ostentatious but empirical man of learning Molière so delighted in portraying later. To hold impostures up to scorn became his aim in after life, and jealousy the keynote of his own misery. By a coincidence almost prophetic, the pedant and the jealous husband both appear in this, his earliest existing play.

The Flying Physician is merely a French adaptation of *Il Medico volante*, a *scenario* played by Scaramouche. Entirely Italian in spirit and far less simple than its predecessor, it is, in brief, a coarse farce in one act of "three or four surprises and two or three disguises." The use here made of a door and a window by a character who disappears and reappears as speedily as Harlequin in the Christmas pantomime, indicates that Molière's company carried scenery, while its story of a lover aided by a rascally servant in outwitting an obdurate father, a favourite theme of Italian farce, recurs more than once in the poet's later plays. A matter of more moment, however, is the first appearance here of the merry-andrew character, Sganarelle. To aid a pair of lovers, he is represented as assuming a doctor's guise, and it is interesting to note that this incident became the motive of Molière's far more amusing farce, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (*Le Médecin malgré lui*).

In *The Flying Physician* Sganarelle is represented as a masquerading *fourbe*, or knave, and one is tempted to believe that in the original manuscript he was called Mascarille — a name derived from the Spanish term

mascarilla, meaning a little mask, or from the Italian word *maschera* — and used by Molière in other farces of this period to designate this same rascally, intriguing servant of Italian origin. Sganarelle, being a French transliteration of the Italian word *Zannarello*, the diminutive of Zanni (a familiar form of Giovanni), is our English zany, a silly-John, or foolish clown in a play. In all other instances Molière's Sganarelle, even when endowed with the attributes of a French bourgeois and voicing the poet's own sentiments, was within this definition.

A recurrence of the same character in successive pieces was so usual at the time, that *farceurs*, both Italian and French, became known by the rôles they played habitually; thus, the Italian buffoon, Tiberio Fiurelli, was called Scaramouche; and René Berthelot — Du Parc of Molière's company — Gros-René. Molière discarded the rôle of his early successes shortly after his return to Paris, and his reputation as an author soon overshadowed his histrionic ability, else he would probably have been known to posterity as Mascarille.

Both Mascarille and Sganarelle are more than mere low-comedy characters. Each represents a period of Molière's work and a distinct phase in his development. When he began writing farce, he was a dweller in that land of the free and home of the beautiful we call Bohemia: to thwart a bailiff was his pastime; to supply humour for a company of strolling players his chief care. The farces and comedies he wrote under these conditions are entirely in the spirit of Italian zanyism; and sprightly, quick-witted Mascarille, their recurring character, is typical of these happy-go-lucky days in the poet's own life. This Mascarille, the *gran furbo* of decadent Italy, is a rascal, cunning to a degree, and

wholly without morals. His intimacy with his master is transalpine, too, for as some Frenchman contends — and if memory serves it is Stendhal — "in Italy there is a diversity in fortune, but none in manners." Molière made no attempt to gallicise either the plots or the characters of his earlier plays, and even *The Blunderer*, though an ambitious comedy in verse, is really an adaptation.

This first, or Italian, period ended in 1659 with the production of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, that play of untranslatable title — unless one is willing to countenance *The Laughable Lady-Euphuists*. Mascarille, a naturalised Frenchman at last, made his final appearance in this brilliant comedy of manners: the first true flight of Molière's genius beyond Italian zanyism.

If Mascarille be typical of the Italian, Sganarelle may be said to represent the second, or Gallic, period of Molière's work. Discarding transalpine models, except as bare suggestions in the way of plots, the poet became truly national; for in such comedies as *The School for Husbands* (*L'École des maris*, 1661), *The School for Wives* (*L'École des femmes*, 1662), and *The Forced Marriage* (*Le Mariage forcé*, 1664), his point of view is essentially Gallic, his wit in the spirit of Rabelais. Sganarelle, too, though first a zany, is always a bourgeois through and through, and often a jealous man of forty in love with a young coquette: in other words, a Frenchman and another phase of the poet himself.

Closely allied with the Gallic, in point of time, was the third, or obsequious, period when Molière's art became a courtier's stratagem. To win the favour of his King, he wrote court plays, such as *The Bores* (*Les Fâcheux*, 1661), *The Versailles Impromptu* (*L'Im-*

promptu de Versailles, 1663), and various ballets for the royal fêtes. They were merely a means to an end, but none the less they represent another aspect of Molière. He no longer walked in Italian leading-strings, and his wit became more delicate than the broad Gallic humour of Sganarelle; but he was Molière, the courtier, a man who felt it an honour to make the King's bed, who never lost an opportunity to sign his name *valet de chambre tapissier du roi*.[1]

When thus assured of his monarch's protection, he arose in all his strength and became the poet militant. Two masterpieces, *The Hypocrite* (*Le Tartuffe*) and *The Misanthrope*, distinguish the fourth period, or that of aggression. Success walked hand in hand with him, but happiness had turned aside; gaining full knowledge of the canting world after "the voice of all the gods" had spoken bitterly, he became the champion of truth, the implacable foe of imposture and formalism. Realising to the full his highest duty, he attacked the foibles and hypocrisy of society with "ridiculous likenesses." His genius reached its zenith then.

In the period that followed, his powers began to wane, almost imperceptibly, it is true, but with a recognition of the futility of breaking lances against church walls which left him content with satirical rapier play. Apprentice in an Italian workshop, then Gallic journeyman, courtier, and knight-errant, he became at last a master craftsman; for, if the period of *The Hypocrite* and *The Misanthrope* was militant, the next, and last, was fully histrionic.

[1] Even when a strolling player, he signed his name at Narbonne, in 1650, as "Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, valet de chambre du roi," although he had previously renounced the reversion of his father's office in favour of his younger brother.

To be convinced of this one need only study the Molière repertory of the Théâtre Français at the present time. *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *The Miser*, *The Burgher, a Gentleman* (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*), *The Rascalities of Scapin* (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*), *The Learned Women* (*Les Femmes savantes*), and *The Imaginary Invalid*, the most readily acted as well as the most frequently presented of his plays, were still to be written, and all during the last seven years of his life. It was a period of unerring success from the dramatic point of view; but one may still search through it in vain for a poetical masterpiece of human philosophy such as *The Misanthrope*.

This division of Molière's work into five periods has been made in order that the reader may understand how thoroughly the poet's muse was affected by the events of his own life. An author may write what he has seen, what he has felt, or what he has imagined ; and Molière's work, like that of nearly every genius, was a constant blending of the three. He wrote what he saw and what he imagined, yet his writing was invariably tempered by his own feelings at the time. In his plays one may read the story of his life: Mascarille, the light-hearted bohemian; Sganarelle, the jealous man of forty seeking domestic happiness in vain; Éraste, the courtier and wit condemned to be bored since he durst not offend ; Alceste, the generous misanthrope who, in spite of his philosophy of life and knowledge of the world's imposture, loves a heartless coquette because "he cannot banish all past tenderness, howsoever ardently he longs to hate her"; and in a way, Argan, the hawking invalid, married to a faithless wife, — are, part by part, Molière himself, concealed little more than the ostrich with its head in the sand.

To appreciate how unconsciously his imagination was influenced by experience, one should have undergone the discouragement, indifference, toleration, praise, and envy which are the lot of even a moderately successful author; above all, realise that "learning is but an adjunct to ourself," for in the words of Molière's one surpassing rival:

> "Never durst poet touch a pen to write
> Until his ink were temper'd with love's sighs;
> Oh, then his lines would ravish savage ears
> And plant in tyrants mild humility.
> From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
> They are the books, the arts, the academes
> That show, contain, and nourish all the world:
> Else none at all in aught proves excellent."

This grouping of Molière's plays as Italian, Gallic, time-serving, militant, and histrionic, in accordance with the poet's varying sentiments and ambitions, may be open to challenge; but any classification from a purely literary point of view would be more difficult to compass, since, partly owing to fear of giving too great offence, partly to wise generalship, his work invariably took a reactionary turn after each step in advance.

Returning to the first, or Italian period, it should be borne in mind that only four of Molière's earlier pieces have been preserved: *The Jealousy of Smutty Face*, *The Flying Physician*, *The Blunderer*, and *The Love Tiff* (*Le Dépit amoureux*).[1] The first two, as has been seen, are unworthy of consideration in the literary sense; but *The Blunderer*, his first play in verse, was likewise the first demonstration that he possessed qualities beyond those

[1] *The Love Tiff*, produced at Béziers in 1656, is considered in the ensuing chapter.

of a mere *farceur*. When Molière wrote this piece, tragi-comedy had banished farce to the provinces. Pure comedy did not exist. Corneille, it is true, had transformed a Spanish *comedia*[1] into the versified *The Liar*, a so-called comedy, and in doing this he is said to have pointed the road for Molière. When the younger poet turned an Italian *commedia* into another so-called comedy and named it *The Blunderer*, he did no more than follow in the footsteps of his guide.

A farce is a play full of exaggeration and drollery; a comedy, a dramatic picture of life treated sincerely but lightly. Absurd situations distinguish the one; truth and characterisation the other; therefore, in spite of their Alexandrine verses and five-act construction, both *The Liar* and *The Blunderer* were but exotic farces transplanted to French soil under a false name.

By putting stage humour into literary form, Corneille pointed the road, perhaps, but he did not create French comedy. To Molière belongs that honour; for although farcical in construction, *Les Précieuses ridicules* is the first true dramatic picture of the light and trivial occurrences of French life. However, Molière's first genuine comedy must give place for the time being to the story of his first success.

When he reached Lyons about 1653, he was still a strolling player whose farces had no more merit than those of any other play-hack of the time. They were, indeed, so coarse that he felt called upon to write something more suitable to the taste of a cosmopolitan city, and, as the rich of Lyons were bankers from Lombardy and Tuscany, an Italian motive seemed most likely to fill the coffers of his company.

[1] *La Verdad sospechosa.*

Troupes of comedians from Italy had frequently made pilgrimages to the city by the Rhone; and one in particular, called the *Gelosi*, led by Francesco Andreini, together with his more celebrated sister, Isabella, had even had the honour of playing at Paris before Louis XIII, when Molière was a lad. In this company was a comedian named Nicolò Barbieri, known on the stage as Beltrame, who, like Molière, was a composer of farces for his troupe. Barbieri, becoming more ambitious, decided to embroider one of his best *scenarii* into a written farce; but the subject had been used by Plautus and, again, by a blind poet of the Renaissance named Luigi Groto; so he could hardly lay claim to it as his own property.

Molière, following in Barbieri's footsteps, thought the time-worn plot of this play, *The Dolt* (*L'Inavvertito*), might be worked over so as to appeal once more to the Italian taste of Lyons; and when it had been refurbished in Alexandrine verse and rechristened by him, it became *The Blunderer; or, The Mishaps* (*L'Étourdi ou les Contretemps*). Because its five-act construction and classical versification raise it, from a purely literary point of view, far above the level of farce, many critics accept this play as Molière's first real comedy; but when looked at from the stage point of view, it stands as farce pure and simple. Filled with absurd and improbable situations, it could by no stretch of the imagination be styled a sincere dramatic picture of life. To be convinced of this, one need only to study its exaggerated plot.

The scene is laid in Messina, where Pandolfe, a worthy citizen, has arranged that his son Lélie shall marry Hippolyte, the daughter of Anselme, his bosom friend. Unfortunately for the realisation of this parental scheme, Lélie is in love with Clélie, a beautiful slave, owned by a

cantankerous master named Trufaldin, while Hippolyte has bestowed her unrequited affections upon Léandre, a young man of good family, who, like Lélie, is infatuated with the slave girl and intent upon possessing her. Lélie is the blunderer whose stupidities give the piece its name; Mascarille, his rascally servant, whose mischievous schemes to aid in rescuing Clélie from the hands of Trufaldin are unwittingly blocked by his master.

To thread the maze of Mascarille's intrigues and Lélie's blundering would only weary the reader; for the rascal's trickery, though amusing when presented before an audience, is highly improbable and hard to follow. As he invariably fails to inform his master of his schemes, the latter as conscientiously upsets them by some stupid counterplot. Whether it be a plan to make old Anselme overlook a purse he has dropped by flattering him with a story of a lady's languishing love for him, or an attempt to enter Trufaldin's house with a party of maskers for the purpose of abducting Clélie, the outcome is the same. Lélie either picks up the purse and returns it to its lawful owner, or warns Trufaldin of the intended raid, before Mascarille can make him aware that he is spoiling a scheme to purloin the purchase price of Clélie or a brilliant plan to forestall his rival, Léandre.

In fact, the plot of *The Blunderer* is one quick succession of knaveries in which Mascarille, by the use of every stratagem he can invent, endeavours to obtain possession of Clélie in the interest of a master who, with the best of intentions, is ever upsetting the rascal's plans, until he finally exclaims that he will no longer ask help because he is "a dog, a traitor, a detestable wretch whom death alone can succour, unworthy of aid and incapable of anything." But before suicide can crown Lélie's folly,

Clélie turns out to be Trufaldin's long-lost daughter and is duly given in marriage to her blundering lover. Léandre requites Hippolyte's enduring passion, and Mascarille exclaims in his single blessedness, "May heaven give us children whose fathers we really are!"

Mr. Richard Mansfield once told the present writer that he would not accept a play unless the *scenario* could be written on a visiting card. He meant that a well-constructed modern piece should tell its story so concisely that the curtain situations, climax, and dénouement could be indicated within limits so narrow. Judged by such a standard, *The Blunderer* fails lamentably. It is, however, an unfair example of Molière's craftsmanship. Far too involved and with situations too exaggerated for true comedy, the marvellous characterisation which so distinguishes his later work is almost entirely lacking. Later in life he tells stories of human interest in so concise a way that he may be justly called the first modern play-writer, but not until after his genius has risen superior to Italian zanyism.

The Blunderer, it should be remembered, is little more than a French adaptation of an Italian farce filched from classic sources. Mascarille is a paraphrase of Pseudolus, the knavish slave of Plautus, and the play itself merely a new rendering of an old plot which, shorn of Alexandrine verse, remains farce pure and simple. Instead of presenting it as an original piece of work, Molière gave it an Italian hall-mark; but he was then unready to exclaim, as he did at a later day, "Let us cease to be Italian, let us disdain being Spanish, let us be French."

Far from being a natural type, knavish Mascarille is merely the vehicle for an intricate plot; but on the other hand artless Lélie, the blunderer, rings true. His very

folly is genuine, and, being a lovable personality who falls a victim to his own frankness, he may be said to foreshadow Molière's powers of characterisation. His passion for Clélie, too, is a commendable sentiment; for even when strategy forces him to depreciate her qualities, he exclaims in all sincerity, "To blame where I adore is to wound me to the soul." His honest incapacity for deception is again shown when, smuggled into Trufaldin's house disguised as an Armenian, he is admonished in this manner by Mascarille for so clearly showing his love:

What tantalises me beyond compare
Is seeing you so far forget yourself.
By Clélie's side, your love is like a porridge
Stewing up to its brim beside too fierce
A fire, then boiling over everywhere.

LÉLIE

Could I coerce myself to more restraint?
Thus far with her I've scarcely had a word.

MASCARILLE

In sooth; yet silence is not all. Your conduct
During one moment of the feast lent more
Of substance to suspicion than the rest
Would give in all the year.

LÉLIE

Pray you, explain.

MASCARILLE

Explain what all have seen? Your eyes were e'er
Close fixed upon the table-seat where she
Was placed by Trufaldin. To everything
Oblivous, you ogled, blushed, and saw
Not what they served; for only when she drank
Did dryness parch your lips. Her glass you seized

With eagerness from out her hand, you stopped
To rinse it not, drank down the dregs, lost ne'er
A drop, and boldly showed your preference
For spots her lips had pressed. Yes, every bit
She touched with her fair hand or chose to put
To her white teeth, you laid your paw upon
Far quicker than a cat upon a mouse —
To gobble it as if it were pease-pudding.

From the literary point of view, such touches of genuine sentiment, told with true poetical feeling, entitle *The Blunderer* to the name of comedy it has always borne. In spite of seemingly inexhaustible intrigue, it is still above mere Italian farce; for its verse, although not masterful, is delightful in expression and literary in quality. Judged as the first attempt of a dramatic hack to rise above the vulgarity of one-act *canevas*, it is indeed a marvellous performance. When first presented, it carried fastidious Lyons by storm and raised this strolling play-wright to the rank of dramatic poet. Even now one cannot read its sprightly story without realising that a new king was crowned that day.

V

THE COMEDIANS OF THE PRINCE OF CONTI

No longer a disheartened youth fleeing from his creditors, the Molière that left Lyons during the summer of 1653 was a fairly successful man of thirty-one. The tempestuous days of his youth were over; his love for Madeleine Béjart had reached the comfortable stage of companionship; the occasional flurries which disturbed his calm, such as his fancies for Mlles. du Parc and de Brie, were nothing more than passing zephyrs. The storm of passion which was to embitter later years had shown no signs of gathering. The man was a vagabond, it is true, but a prosperous vagabond with a following in the cities of the South, and friends to welcome him. Capricious Paris was still unwon, but his unconquered fields were merely those of ambition.

While he was winning his first laurel crown on the Lyons stage, Molière's former schoolmate, Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti and generalissimo of the opera bouffe army of the Fronde, had been making peace with Mazarin. The wily cardinal, thinking a friend in hand better than an enemy at large, granted the rebellious prince complete amnesty with a view to offering him his niece, Anna Martinozzi, in marriage and, with her, the governorship of a province, when the young man's temper should have cooled sufficiently. Conti spent his period of probation at the chateau of La Grange des Prés

in Languedoc in company with Mme. de Calvimont, his mistress, who, like most frivolous ladies, found that country life paled before the gaieties of Paris. The mild diversions of Languedoc being soon exhausted, she proposed to send for some comedians, — a caprice not to be doubted, since the story is told at first hand in the memoirs of the Abbé Daniel de Cosnac.

Having the disbursement of the prince's fund for amusement, this prelate decided to gratify the lady's whim by engaging Molière's troupe, then in Languedoc, for some performances. Another company, managed by an actor named Cormier, had arrived in the neighbouring city of Pézenas meanwhile, and, royal mistresses being nothing if not fickle, Mme. de Calvimont declared she could wait no longer for her diversion.[1] To humour her the prince summoned this rival organisation to his chateau, and the upshot was that when Molière arrived he found Cormier in possession. He demanded full payment for his services, but this Conti refused. The abbé, having pledged his word, was on the point of presenting the disgruntled actor with a thousand *écus* of his own money, when the prince was persuaded by his secretary, the poet Sarrasin, to command a performance at La Grange des Prés. Molière's company did not please Mme. de Calvimont, and was consequently out of favour with her royal lover; but the audience found it superior to the rival troupe, both in acting and *mise en scène*. After a second performance the praise was so universal that the prince was forced to banish Cormier.

[1] Because of the readiness with which she accepted presents, Sainte-Beuve calls Mme. de Calvimont *la femme à cadeaux*, — a name well merited, since the Abbé de Cosnac assures us that Cormier rewarded her liberally for the privilege of playing at La Grange des Prés.

The chasm between royalty and vagabondism being too great for any boyhood friendship to bridge, youthful ties played small part in the bestowal of Conti's patronage. On the contrary, Molière's success seems to have been due to the charm of one of his actresses; for the Abbé de Cosnac in his guileless way observes that "the prince's secretary supported Molière's company in the first instance at his instigation, but after falling a victim to the charms of Mlle. du Parc, he became its champion for her sake."

In telling the story of "The Illustrious Theatre" Grimarest says that "the Prince de Conti invited Molière to his Parisian hotel on several occasions and encouraged him"; but Armand de Bourbon was not likely to have been a patron of the drama at the age of fifteen, and his reception to Molière at La Grange des Prés was not of the nature one would expect from a former protector and schoolmate. There is a possibility, of course, that Molière appeared at the Hôtel de Conti in 1651, when in Paris to transact business in connection with his mother's estate; but it is far more likely that his first professional appearance before the Prince de Conti was the one at La Grange des Prés just recounted (September, 1653), — an event so momentous that for three years thereafter his company was known as "The Comedians of the Prince de Conti."

In order to indulge in a final debauch before going to Paris for his wedding, Conti, shortly after Molière's début at La Grange des Prés, set out for Montpellier to visit the Comte d'Aubijoux, the governor. There he dismissed Mme. de Calvimont with a niggardly gift of six hundred pistoles,[1] and installed in her place a certain Mlle.

[1] The prince's original gift was six hundred pistoles, but the Abbé de Cosnac, charged with the dismissal of Mme. de Calvimont, increased

Rochelle. His stinginess was notorious, but with the public funds he was not so chary. After he had married Mazarin's niece and been named Governor of Guyenne (February twenty-second, 1654), Molière's troupe was summoned to the States (*Les États*) held at Montpellier during the winter of 1654-55, and was so well reimbursed from the parliamentary exchequer that, on February eighteenth, 1655, Antoine Baralier, tax-gatherer at Montélimart, acknowledged an indebtedness to Madeleine Béjart (probably acting as the troupe's treasurer) of thirty-two hundred livres. By April first the profits of the organisation had so augmented that La Béjart was able to lend the province of Languedoc the sum of ten thousand livres, while, at a session of the States held at Pézenas in the winter of 1655-56, the authorities paid the company the sum of six thousand livres for its services.[1]

The years of discouragement were ended. Henceforth there is no distress to chronicle, unless it be a collection said to have been made among the inhabitants of Marseillan for "the relief of these comedians whom insufficient receipts had placed in need," or a dispute with the magistrates of Vienne over the right to play in their city. Molière, the manager of a successful company,

this sum to a thousand — the only present, save a diamond, which the lady ever received from her miserly protector; making her habit of receiving gifts from others seem less unpardonable.

[1] The *livre*, originally of the value of a pound of silver (the *sol*, or *sou*, being a twentieth part thereof), is the modern franc. Its weight and value have varied considerably during the centuries. In Molière's day the *livre tournois* of twenty sols, or sous (there being also a *livre parisis* of twenty-five sous), had a purchasing power about equivalent to that of the American dollar of to-day. The *pistole*, according to M. E. Littré (*Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*), was worth ten *livres tournois*; the *écu*, three *livres*.

now playing a season in Lyons, now returning to Languedoc at the summons of a prince, was likewise a dramatic poet of considerable local reputation. His treasury was comfortably filled; but he was a vagabond in the eyes of society and the law, nevertheless.

Nicolas Chorier, in his *Life of Pierre de Boissat*,[1] presents Molière's social standing in an unmistakable way. Boissat, a member of the Academy, who had been a loose living author of erotic novels in his youth, had settled down at Vienne, a suburb of Lyons, to pass the remainder of his days in the contrite scribbling of moral treatises. The actor's senior by some twenty years, he was none the less his friend; and, according to Chorier, did not go about speaking ill of him, "like certain people who affected a foolish and haughty austerity of manner toward Molière," but insisted that "a man so distinguished in his art should have a place at his table." Moreover, when the actor visited Vienne, Boissat gave him excellent suppers, and "did not, like some fanatics, place him in the ranks of 'impious rascals,' although he was excommunicated." A writer himself, this academician viewed Molière in a liberal light, but the attitude of the Church towards the stage was so rancorous that to the community at large a strolling player, such as he, was an excommunicated reprobate. Professionally he might visit the chateau of a prince, or draw a pension from the treasury of a province, but his place was still among the outcasts.

Boissat, however, was not the only man of intelligence to recognise Molière's merit during those years of wandering. There is a tradition that when he first took to the road, he knew the poet Goudouli, and used to

[1] *De Petri Boessatii . . . vita amicisque litteratis.*

visit him at Toulouse; but a more incontestable friendship was that with two artist brothers named Mignard. Nicolas, the elder, a painter, architect, and engraver of Avignon, persuaded him to give some performances in the papal city; while Pierre, his more celebrated younger brother, painted his portrait as Cæsar in Corneille's *Pompey*.

Pierre Mignard had been destined by his father for the medical profession, but his love of art had been too strong to overcome — a story not unlike that of Molière's own experience with the law and the stage — and possibly this resemblance in their early lives proved the bond of sympathy which made their friendship lasting.

At Carcassonne, in 1651 or 1652, Molière met Charles Coypeau d'Assoucy, a scapegrace poet, who sang his own verses to a tinkling lute; and in 1655 they passed three months together at Lyons. D'Assoucy had been one of the bohemian set in Molière's youth, of which Chapelle and Bachaumont were shining lights; being in a state of abject poverty through a passion for gaming, Molière took pity on him, and invited him to be his guest during a trip to Avignon.

Known as Scarron's monkey, and styled by himself the "Emperor of Burlesque," this profligate travelled through France and Italy attended by two fantastic pages whose sex was a matter of dispute; but he had sufficient manliness to say in his autobiography[1] that "what pleased him most at Lyons was meeting Molière and the Béjart brothers." "As comedy has its charms," he continues, "I could not leave such delightful friends, so I remained three months at Lyons amid the dice-cups, comedians, and feasts, although I should have done far

[1] *Les Aventures de Monsieur d'Assoucy.*

better not to have remained a single day." This apparent ingratitude was inspired by a realisation of his besetting sin; for when he and Molière drifted down the Rhone to Avignon, the wretch lost his last *écu*, his ring, and his cloak at the dice-cups, yet paid the following tribute to the actor's generosity and friendship:

As a man is never poor so long as he has friends, so I, having the esteem of Molière and the friendship of all the Béjart family, found myself richer and more content than ever. These generous people were not satisfied with assisting me as a friend, but wished to treat me as one of the family. Being summoned to the States, they took me with them to Pézenas, and words fail to tell of all the favours I received from the entire household. It is said that the best of brothers is tired at the end of one month of feeding his brother; but these people, more generous than all the brothers one could have, never tired through all one winter of seeing me at their table.

That table was well furnished, for Molière lived on the fat of the land during those Languedocian days. When at Narbonne, he was always a guest at the Three Nurses Hotel; and he grew so fond of the succulent fish and waterfowl of Mèze that the hostelry there, known as the Holy Spirit, obtained the sobriquet of "The Actors' Inn." "Never was a beggar thus fattened!" cries D'Assoucy, — an exclamation which causes Karl Mantzius[1] to draw this charming picture of Molière's well-filled board and its familiars:

His [D'Assoucy's] words conjure up before our eyes the picture of Madeleine Béjart, strong and well built,

[1] *Molière and his Times: The Theatre in France in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. IV, *History of Theatrical Art.*

with her bright, intelligent face, presiding over the sumptuous table, where seven or eight courses were the usual fare; Molière, — with his large brown eyes under dark, bushy brows, and a humorous smile about his full, sensitive mouth, — watching the greedy, loquacious poet of the highroads, who is having an argument with the sharp tongued Louis Béjart, while the quiet elder brother sits by and enjoys himself in silence. But after the meal musical instruments are brought out, the sparkling ruby-coloured muscat is placed on the table, and merry songs and stories go on, till Madeleine's authoritative voice gives the signal to break up, and every one goes about his business. Molière retires to work at a new five-act play in verse, Joseph Béjart puts the last touch to his work on heraldry,[1] Madeleine goes to her accounts, while D'Assoucy makes an effort to tear himself away from the sweet muscat wine.

Chapelle and Bachaumont went South during the autumn of 1656; and if Molière met them journeying through Languedoc, as the story goes,[2] the sight of these comrades of his youth must have made him long for the joys of Paris; yet his friendships were not confined to poets, artists, and gay sprigs from the capital. One at least was of a more commercial nature.

In the town of Sigean, not far from Narbonne, lived Martin-Melchoir Dufort, a burgher, with whom Molière

[1] *Recueil des titres, qualités, blazons et armes des Seigneurs Barons des Estats Généraux de la Province de Languedoc tenus à Pézenas,* 1654.

[2] M. Mesnard (*Notice biographique sur Molière*) does not believe that Chapelle met Molière during this trip. In substantiation of this contention he calls attention to the fact that Chapelle in his account of this journey (*Voyage de Chapelle*, Saint-Marc édition, 1755) describes a comedy he saw played at a country house near Carcassonne, which "was not bad," but makes no mention of Molière, — a strange omission, had he met his old schoolmate at this time.

is reputed to have lodged when he travelled in the service of his King. This journey itself being a matter of doubt, the story that Dufort came to Molière's aid at a later day may be accepted with reservations, especially as there are two ways of telling it. The popular version is that, instead of being paid for his services during the States held at Montpellier in 1654–55, the actor received a promissory note drawn upon the military fund of the province (*fonds des étapes*) for five thousand livres. Though a considerable sum, this was not ready money, but Dufort played the friend in need by discounting the royal paper with twelve hundred and fifty livres cash and a bill of exchange for the remainder.

M. Loiseleur,[1] on the other hand, insists that, a draft being drawn by one Cassaignes (joint trustee with Molière's friend of the military fund) on Dufort himself, this bill of exchange was merely an official connivance between Conti, the two trustees, and the treasurer of the province to cover the irregularity of paying comedians from the public treasury; yet even this author admits that "the affair is most obscure."

Of far more interest than this equivocal transaction, are the difficulties Molière's actors met in travelling during those happy-go-lucky days. When in the royal service, they journeyed luxuriously at the public expense in carriages requisitioned by the Prince de Conti, and were even escorted by *gendarmes;* but the official countenance once removed, they were often reduced to a horse for each two actresses or three actors of the company. Even when the means of transport was a waggon and temporary opulence permitted an exchange

[1] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière.* See also *Le Moliériste*, August, 1885, article by Auguste Baluffe.

from oxen to horses, the difficulty of locomotion seems to have been only enhanced; for among the more or less truthful anecdotes gathered by M. Galibert (Emmanuel Raymond) for his delightful story of Molière's wanderings in Languedoc[1] is one to the effect that while the troupe was travelling from Pézenas to Béziers, the cart came to a sudden halt and the driver announced that it was impossible to go farther. When the comedians protested that they were only half-way, the jehu replied that a rush of blood had paralysed the right eye of his colt, a young gelding thirty years old.

"And for that you mean to stop?" continued the actors. "Your other two horses will lead the colt."

"Impossible! My other two horses are both blind, and the colt which used to lead them was blind in one eye before the accident." After this revelation there was nothing to do but take foot to the journey's end.

To trace the route the company followed in that summer land is hardly necessary, even were it always possible. When not attending upon the States of Languedoc at Pézenas, Béziers, or Montpellier, or playing at La Grange des Prés, they were travelling back and forth among the neighbouring towns of Mèze, Lunel, Gignac,[2] Marseillan, Agde, Nissan, or Montagnac. They usually went to Lyons once a year, and made excursions up and down the valley of the Rhone or eastward to

[1] *Histoire des pérégrinations de Molière dans le Languedoc.*

[2] Among the legends told by M. Galibert is one to this effect: The town council having inscribed upon a public fountain of Gignac, *Quæ fuit ante fugax, arte perennis erit,* some admiring citizens of the place asked Molière one day the meaning of the words. He gave as his translation:

> Thou eager looker-on, who 'dst know it all,
> Here Gignac asses for their water call.

Toulouse and Carcassonne, sometimes by waggon, sometimes in the saddle.

On the horseback journeys Molière, as manager of the company, had a nag to himself; and M. Galibert tells another humorous legend about his saddle-bag containing the tragedy regalia, which the rustics often mistook for jewels. One morning, too absorbed in day-dreaming to note his property slipping from his horse's crupper, the actor rode on, while two peasant girls made quick to seize such untold wealth. Molière discovered his loss, however, before they had made off with their booty; but one of these imps, quick-witted enough to cover the bag with her petticoats until his back was turned, sent it tumbling into the ditch with a dexterous kick, and ran to direct the fictitious search, while her comrade secured the plunder.

In telling this story Molière asked laughingly how it could have turned out otherwise "when from Gignac you go through Brignac only to turn your steps toward Montagnac, while passing Lavagnac, and in the midst of these *gnic* and these *gnac*, you hear without motive and without cessation, *Agaro Moussu! Ah! boutats Moussu! Aoù sabètz pas Moussu! Pécaïré Moussu!* until your ears, eyes, and wits become so confused by these weird sounds, accompanied by still stranger gestures, that you end by losing what was only mislaid." In the course of time, however, he became proficient in the soft language of the South, and used it intelligently in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*.

Mediæval Pézenas was Molière's headquarters in Languedoc, his favourite resort the barber shop of Maître Gély. Seated in an armchair, known to this day as *le fauteuil de Molière*, he delighted to gossip with this

Figaro's customers or improvise little comedies for his own delectation.

One day a patron mistook him for the barber; ever ready to try his hand at a new rôle, Molière smeared the fellow's face with lather. Too merciful to cut an innocent throat, he confined his tonsorial efforts to hair raising stories about supposed robberies, fires, murders, and sudden deaths, until the victim, overcome with horror, ran headlong from the shop, leaving a cravat as evidence of the actor's success on the garrulous side of barbering.

On another occasion a country lass came to the shop with a letter from her wounded betrothed at the wars for Gély to read; but he, being busy, directed her to Molière with the remark that "there is a gentleman who reads far better than I!" Contents were improvised to suit the actor's fancy. To counteract the story that the maiden's lover had distinguished himself for bravery, but had lost an arm, he was obliged to invent a triumph of surgical skill whereby the wounded soldier recovered both his arm and his spirits. Upon learning that this miraculous cure had caused such a commotion in the neighbourhood that a rich lady insisted upon marrying her hero, the poor girl might have ended her life with one of Gély's razors, had Molière not told her, as a final anodyne, that her lover was true despite every allurement. All might have gone well, had not the letter been shown to some one who could read without embroidering. Even then the girl refused to believe the truth and exclaimed, in tribute to Molière's skill in romancing, "There is a gentleman at Gély's who knows how to read far better!"[1]

[1] These various legends are taken as stated from M. Galibert's *Histoire des pérégrinations de Molière dans le Languedoc*. The author, who wrote under the *nom de plume* of Emmanuel Raymond, heard them

Barber shops were the news centres in those days, the gathering places for gossips. Molière, sitting in his arm-chair by Gély's window, noted many absurdities among the patrons waiting their turn at the brass basin for future use; but the States of Languedoc were quite as rich a mine for character and local colour.

In the monarchical machine which dexterous Richelieu had built from a feudal scrap-heap and crafty Mazarin was oiling to perfection, the States (*Les États*), or provincial parliaments, were political fly-wheels designed to go round and round to aid in preserving without disturbing the balance. Their functions being more imaginary than real, their sessions became the rendezvous for provincial society; hence Molière, official entertainer to the States of Languedoc, was brought in contact with the country imitators of Parisian ways. During a session at Montpellier in 1655, the ladies and gentlemen of the province, assisted by professionals, presented a phantasy called *The Ballet of the Incompatibles* before the newly wed Princesse de Conti. Molière appeared both as a poet and a scolding fishwife; and to avoid discussing his possible authorship of this mediocre ballet — a veritable literary deformity after *The Blunderer*, were such the

told in his youth by J. F. Cailhava d'Estandoux, a Languedocian dramatist who died in 1813 at the age of eighty-two. Throughout his life Cailhava was an ardent admirer of Molière; yet he cannot be explicitly trusted in the matter of accuracy. In his youth he made a trip through Languedoc collecting stories of Molière from the natives, and it was his intention to publish a volume of *Souvenirs de Languedoc*. It is presumed that he wrote portions of this book, but the manuscript has never been discovered. M. Galibert writes the legends from memory, and, although not authenticated, they are repeated because of their interest. Some of them are told as well by M. Jules Taschereau in his *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Molière*.

case — it is sufficient to point out that, having met the high society of Languedoc at such close range, he made trenchant use of country ladies who imitate Parisian ways some four years later in *Les Précieuses ridicules.*

Playing thus at a provincial court, touring a province, supping with his literary friends, studying human nature in Gély's shop, Molière spent three happy years in Languedoc in constant contact with the witchery of sex; yet notwithstanding a host of slanderers to vilify him, the only women — besides Madeleine Béjart and his wife — whose names have been linked with his are those of Mlles. du Parc and de Brie.[1] Although a strolling player in a wanton age, Molière, judged by his contemporaries of exalted rank, instead of being classed among the libertines, should take his place among the more faithful lovers of his day.

Necessity was ever his best taskmaster, so *The Love Tiff* (*Le Dépit amoureux*) is the only play to chronicle for this period of contentment. This five-act comedy in verse, wherein Molière follows the Italian vein of *The Blunderer*, contains two plots so distinct that each may be presented separately. One, an adaptation of Nicolò Secchi's *Cupidity* (*L'Interesse*), concerns the fortunes of Ascagne, a young girl, disguised as a boy in order that she may inherit a fortune left by an uncle to a male heir; the other presents the quarrels of two pairs of lovers, Éraste and his valet Gros-René, Lucile and her maid Marinette. Mascarille again appears, but less prominently than in *The Blunderer;* and judged as a whole *The Love Tiff* is inferior to its predecessor.

[1] M. Galibert calls attention to a legend regarding an intrigue between Molière and the Châtelaine de Lavagnac, but its fabric of truth is too slight to merit serious consideration.

Although the longer and more completely Italian in treatment and origin, the first of these two distinct plots is by far the less interesting. Nicolò Secchi's vulgarity, much to Molière's credit, has been so toned down that, compared with the original, this story of a girl in man's attire becomes a gem of refinement; but the play's chief interest lies in the poet's treatment of the other plot which gives it name. He has been accused of having taken his story of a lover's quarrels from both Italian and Spanish sources, but he is no ordinary pirate. His lovers are painted with a fine Gallic touch, and he tells the story of their passion with such truth and gaiety that *The Love Tiff*, although sadly lacking in clearness, is perhaps the only French play founded on an Italian imbroglio which retains its freshness and youth. Italian tradition is partially discarded, and the master of French comedy revealed for the first time. For this reason *The Love Tiff* is a landmark in the development of Molière's genius.

It was produced at Béziers during the session of the States in 1656, and marks a change in Molière's fortunes as well as in his craftsmanship. Grimarest tells a somewhat apocryphal story to the effect that when the poet Sarrasin died in December, 1654, Molière, then in favour with the Prince de Conti, was offered the post of royal secretary, which he declined through love for his chosen calling. Whatever the truth of this, there is no doubt that Molière lost his patron's favour shortly after the production of *The Love Tiff*, — an event for which neither the play nor his own conduct was in any way responsible.

Armand de Bourbon blew hot or cold according to environment. Opera bouffe hero of the Fronde, tool of Mazarin, and profligate protector of Mme. de

Calvimont, he now became a zealous convert of the Jansenists, — the Puritans of the time. This change of heart was compassed by the Bishop of Aleth; and when the States of Languedoc adjourned on February twenty-second, 1656, the Prince accepted with a child's docility the rules of conduct of the austere order, and banished comedy, dancing, and gaming from his court. So great was his zeal in the new cause that he wrote from Lyons to the Abbé Ciron in the spring of 1657 to say that "there are comedians here who formerly bore my name. I have forbidden them to use it longer, and you may be sure I have taken good care not to attend their performances."

Once more without a patron, Molière was forced to wander for two years through a country he had often visited. Narbonne, Béziers, Nîmes, Lyons, Dijon, and Avignon are places where some trace of him remains; while at Grenoble, early in 1658, he is supposed to have set up his trestles without a license, being consequently forced to remove his play-bills, close his theatre, and humbly beg permission from the offended authorities at the Hôtel de Ville to present his comedies. As Conti retained only "missionaries and policemen" in his suite, Languedoc was no longer a desirable circuit for a company of players; so Molière turned his steps toward Normandy in the spring of 1658, to be within easy reach of Paris and the court.

The company he brought to Rouen in that month of May was a very different organisation from the band of unknown amateurs he had led thither fifteen years before. It was now a compact, well balanced, and accomplished troupe of eleven players; which, to quote the words of Segrais, "was moulded by the hand of the man who was its soul, — a company which could never

have its equal." Besides Molière and the Béjart family, the members were Du Parc, Dufresne, De Brie, Croisac, — this last a *gagiste*, or hired actor having no share in the profits, — and the ladies Catherine de Brie and Marquise du Parc, each a player of ability, and their chief — a master of stage craft.

Their repertory was not confined to the plays of their manager. Indeed these were but secondary to the tragedies of Rotrou and Corneille, and, with the exception of *The Blunderer* and *The Love Tiff*, were merely used as afterpieces. Molière was not yet sufficiently self-confident to set his own work in the foremost place. Even as an actor he felt his limitations.

Nature had refused him the external gifts so necessary on the stage, above all for tragic parts. He had a monotonous voice, hard in inflection, and he spoke with a volubility which made his declamation hurried. He was only able to correct himself of this fault, so contrary to good articulation, by constant effort, through which was produced a sort of hiccough, lasting to his death. He sometimes took advantage of this fault and used it to give a certain variety to his inflection; but it caused him to be accused of an affectation which in time came to be accepted as natural.

This passage is attributed to Mlle. Poisson, a woman whose mother, Mlle. du Croisy, entered Molière's company in 1659, and who herself played a part in one or two of his pieces a year before his death. It was not published until 1740, but the author, both from observation and the stories doubtless told her in her youth, was in a position to appreciate and understand the histrionic difficulties under which Molière laboured.[1]

[1] *Lettre sur la vie et les ouvrages de Molière et sur les comédiens de son temps*, published in the *Mercure de France*, May, 1740. The author-

As director of his troupe, he possessed the cunning of the modern manager. Knowing his public, he gave it pieces suitable to its taste, and only in rare moments, when he dared offer the general a morsel of caviare, did he write to please his own fancy. No detail was too trivial for him to master, and as poet and dramatist he called forth an amount of erudition that would be astonishing in any age. Although he did not hesitate to pluck from Menander, Plautus, Terence, and the dramatists of Italy and Spain, or even to cull material from Montaigne, Brantôme, Noël du Fail, and Rabelais, as well as from the story tellers of his own time, he was nevertheless a student and a deep thinker, — an artist, who painted real men and women in the vigorous colours of truth.

Such was the strolling player who, after an experience of fifteen years in his craft, returned to Rouen, the scene of his first essay in the art of acting. Feeling the time ripe to brave the criticism of the capital, he spent the summer there trying to obtain a hearing at the court. He had made friends among the authorities in many places, and he knew Pierre Mignard, a painter then in high favour with Mazarin. The great Corneille lived at Rouen, too, and his first play had been produced by just such a travelling troupe; so he may have had a fellow feeling for Molière, the more so because in this actor's repertory were many of Corneille's own tragedies. But there is a more human reason for his interest in this strolling company. The Italian beauty, Marquise Thérèse du Parc, so bewitched the great man with her irresistible

ship of this article, although attributed to Mlle. Poisson (née Du Croisy), is far from being authenticated. See *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière* (*Nouvelle collection moliéresque*) by M. Georges Monval.

wiles during that summer at Rouen that he indited verses to her, such as this:

> Dear Marquise, should my face
> Bear marks of life's long race,
> Remember, at my age,[1]
> You 'd scarcely more engage, etc.

Corneille's mediocre brother, too, was led a captive at the lady's chariot wheel and added his small mite of verse to her garland; so doubtless Molière and his company were benefited by this double triumph of their fair comrade.

The name of the courtier who hinted to Monsieur, the brother of the King, that it was befitting his station to have a company of players in his suite, and suggested the late comedians of the Prince de Conti as worthy of his patronage, has never been divined; but Molière used every influence he could command in bringing this event to pass, spending the summer of 1658 in journeying back and forth to Paris, until at last the royal summons came. In October of that eventful year the actresses and actors of his troupe packed their tawdry costumes for the last tramp on the road. No more jolting ox carts or weary footing, no more brutal soldiers of the Fronde to terrorise these humble Thespians: for Paris, bright beneath an azure sky, stood smiling at their journey's end.

[1] Corneille was then fifty-two.

VI

PARISIAN SUCCESS

To assure the company a Paris theatre, should Molière's schemes for a hearing at court miscarry, Madeleine Béjart, as its business manager, began negotiations for a lease of the Théâtre du Marais. The royal summons put an end to this transaction ; yet it is noteworthy, because, in signing a document at Rouen in connection therewith, she gave her address in Paris as the house of " Monsieur Poquelin, *tapissier valet de chambre du Roi*, living in the arcade of the market-place in the parish of St. Eustache."

This was the house Molière's father purchased in September, 1633, and if the actress who had led his son from the paths of duty was his guest, his welcome to the prodigal was complete, to the slaying of the fatted calf. Even an upholsterer by special appointment might pardon a first-born who had written two successful plays; but financial reasons were, perhaps, more potent than pride in inspiring this paternal welcome. Including the sums advanced to absolve his debts, Molière had received only a portion of the money due from his mother's estate. Possibly the elder Poquelin found it easier to forgive than to account.

Of far more importance than Molière's welcome beneath the paternal roof was his first appearance at court. Monsieur, a close-fisted young reprobate of eighteen, wished a company of actors to vie with his brother's troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and to gratify this whim, the late comedians of the Prince de Conti were

commanded for a trial performance. Molière's intrigues had at last borne fruit, but he had reached the age of thirty-six; failure to please meant that he must return to the barns and high-roads of provincial France.

October twenty-fourth, 1658, is a momentous day in the life of this strolling player. To give him audience, ladies with coifs and point lace collars, courtiers in perukes and silken doublets, gathered before a temporary stage in the guard room of the old Louvre; King Louis, too, was there; Monsieur, the profligate; portly Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, triumphant; — possibly brave D'Artagnan stood guard that night. Behind the royal family and the pleasure loving *dames d'honneur* were flippant gentlemen prepared to yawn; actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, to scoff. Amid the glow of candles and the odour of frangipane, Molière made his bow to Paris and the world.

His play was Corneille's tragedy of *Nicomedes;* scorn, the verdict of his rivals. With an inspiration equal to his genius, he stepped before the curtain at the conclusion of the Corneille tragedy, and thanked the King for having pardoned the defects of a company which had appeared with hesitation before so august an assemblage. "The desire," he continued, "of having the honour of amusing *the greatest monarch in the world* had made them forget that his Majesty already had in his service an excellent troupe, of which they were only modest imitators. Since the audience had already endured their awkward country manners, he humbly begged permission to give one of the trifling entertainments which had amused the provinces."

The heart of a king then scarcely past his teens was touched by this artful flattery; therefore Molière, having made his début in the rôle of courtier, placed

upon the boards *The Physician in Love* (*Le Docteur amoureux*), a farce of his own devising. The manuscript of that "trifling entertainment" is lost, but the King's laughter echoes through the centuries. By his decree those "modest imitators" of the royal players became "The Troupe of Monsieur, Only Brother of the King," and the libertine, thus honoured, granted each a pension of three hundred livres. As at La Grange des Prés, Molière's success was, in some measure, due to feminine charms: the Preface of 1682, in speaking of this memorable performance at the Louvre, says that while "the new players did not displease, the charms and the acting of the actresses were, above all, most satisfactory."

Monsieur's pension was a shadowy boon, for with true Orleanist parsimony it was never paid; not so the King's permission to use the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon on the days unoccupied by Scaramouche and his Italian buffoons. A Paris theatre being Molière's quest, no time was lost in agreeing with the transalpine players that for fifteen hundred livres his company should have the right to play Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

According to tradition, as has been seen, Molière, when a lad, took lessons in acting from this same Scaramouche; but in view of the limited time at a French schoolboy's disposal, their mutual tenancy of the Petit Bourbon seems a more likely occasion for this histrionic instruction. That Molière became the pupil of Tiberio Fiurelli, whose stage name, Scaramouche, is a household word,[1] is attested by a quatrain printed beneath a portrait-engraving by Vermeulen of this great buffoon:

[1] "Scaramouche" (Italian *scaramuccio*) was a buffoon part in the old Italian farces. Tiberio Fiurelli was known as Scaramouche because he habitually played this part dressed in black from head to foot.

This actor of illustrious tone
Acquired his art's most pleasing feature:
Though he was Molière's patient teacher,
Dame Nature was herself his own.

The evidence of Le Boulanger de Chalussay, too, is not to be despised, since, by exaggerating fact, he made slander poignant. In his *Élomire the Hypochondriac* he says:

For instance, Élomire,
Fully bent on being any actor's peer,
In a manner wily, laid a cunning plan:
Scaramouche to mimic, justly famous man;
So with mirror went he, every morn and eve,
Face to see reflected, technic to achieve;
For this noted pupil, grimace and wry traits
Imitated neatly in a hundred ways.

Within a week after the performance of *The Physician in Love* before the King, Molière's company made its début at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon. Situated on the right bank of the Seine, between the old Louvre and the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, this theatre had been the palace of the Constable de Bourbon. Confiscated to the State upon his condemnation for high treason, the family arms had been effaced wherever found, and the door daubed with the yellow paint used to mark the houses of criminals convicted of *lèse majesté;* but in spite of such disfigurement, it was, according to Sauval, the "widest, highest, and longest theatre in the kingdom," [1] — a eulogy borne out by a pamphleteer of the period, who asserts that it was "eighteen fathoms long by eight wide, ending in a circular apse seven fathoms deep and eight and a half in width." Vaulted, and covered with

[1] *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris.*

fleurs-de-lis, this spacious auditorium was otherwise in the Doric style, while opposite the daïs of the King stood a stage six feet high by forty-eight square, — an imposing play-house, it would seem, for that or any period.

Monsieur's comedians appeared at the Petit Bourbon November second, 1658. Grimarest maintains that *The Blunderer* was the first piece presented; but Boulanger de Chalussay names five tragedies by Corneille, which were hissed, before Molière resorted to his own plays. The persistence with which he worshipped Melpomene inclines one to belief in the latter contention. In the words of M. Louis Moland,[1] "failure on the one hand, applause on the other, forced Molière to surrender to his own genius. How many attempts were necessary to undeceive him, by what a roundabout way, by what drastic coercion, the author of *The Misanthrope* became almost in spite of himself the greatest of comic poets!"

When the dust was finally shaken from *The Blunderer*, the piece which had set Lyons laughing turned the hisses of the Parisians to applause; when *The Love Tiff* followed "its elder brother," even Boulanger de Chalussay, the slanderer, exclaimed, "C'est là faire et jouer des pièces comme il faut!" Seventy pistoles, according to La Grange, was each actor's share of *The Blunderer's* receipts, and *The Love Tiff* was equally profitable.

The court, absent from Paris since the memorable performance at the Louvre, returned on January twenty-eighth, 1659, and a fortnight later Monsieur honoured his comedians with a visit to the Petit Bourbon, when Molière, ever the courtier, made a speech in compliment to his royal patron.

With the advent of Lent the dramatic season ended.

[1] *Vie de J.-B. P. Molière.*

During the Easter holidays Gros-René and his pretty wife, Mlle. du Parc, inspired no doubt by some trivial theatrical huff, deserted to the Théâtre du Marais, the veteran Dufresne retired from the stage, and the *gagiste* Croisac was discharged. To repair his depleted ranks, Molière engaged two actors of the Théâtre du Marais, Jodelet and his brother De l'Espy, together with three players new to Paris: Charles Varlet, Du Croisy, and his wife, Marie Claveau.

Jodelet, an experienced comedian, known in real life as Julien Bedeau, was a lean *fariné*, or buffoon, who whitened his face with flour, and had but to show himself upon the stage to provoke laughter. He died within a year, so that his association with the company was short-lived; but Charles Varlet remained a member until after Molière's death. Indeed, this latter actor, more usually known by his stage name of Sieur de la Grange (his matronymic, with an assumed nobiliary particle), was the compiler of the famous register of the troupe's receipts and disbursements, still preserved in the archives of the Théâtre Français. Robbed of his inheritance by an absconding guardian, La Grange drifted to the stage and, meeting Molière in Paris, was engaged for subordinate parts at the Petit Bourbon and, upon the death of Joseph Béjart, promoted to be *jeune premier*. Later he became *orateur* of the troupe, and besides compiling his register, edited the first complete edition of Molière's works (1682), in conjunction with his friend Vinot. In 1672 La Grange married Marie (or Marotte) Ragueneau, the pastry-cook-poet's daughter, who, serving first as Mlle. de Brie's maid, became a ticket collector for the company, then a character actress.

Philibert Gassot, a gentleman of Beauce, best known

by the pseudonym of Sieur du Croisy, had been head of a strolling company. Even his obesity could not destroy his graceful bearing on the stage, and he was reckoned one of Molière's best comedians. At the time of his advent at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, he was married to Marie Claveau, an indifferent actress engaged because of her husband's talent; while the same might be said of Jodelet's brother, Sieur de l'Espy, who failed except in parts written to suit his eccentricities.

With his company thus enlarged, Molière opened the theatrical season of 1659 by playing *The Love Tiff* at the chateau de Chilly-Mazarin before the Maréchal de la Meilleraye's august guest, the King. This comedy in verse gave the young monarch a better opportunity of judging its author's merits than the farce he had witnessed in the guard room of the Louvre, and his discernment proved keener than that of his courtiers. Even Jean Loret, the society journalist of the day, considered the comedy played at Chilly of no more importance than the violins provided for his Majesty's diversion, but Louis was so edified that on May tenth *The Blunderer* was played before him at the Louvre.[1]

During this command performance Joseph Béjart, the company's *jeune premier*, if the term be not a misnomer

[1] What more remains to say —
The violins? the play?

Muse historique, April 19, 1659.

La Muse historique, a weekly pamphlet in which current events in politics, literature, the drama, and society were treated wittily in verse by its editor, Jean Loret, constituted the press of the period, together with its senior, *La Gazette de France*, established in 1631 by Théophraste Renoudot. *Le Mercure galant*, founded by Donneau de Vizé, which, later, became *Le Mercure de France*, filled the rôle of monthly magazine.

for a man fifty-one years old, was taken ill while playing his accustomed part of Lélie, and died a few days later. His sister's companion in her early wanderings, the poet's comrade since the days of "The Illustrious Theatre," his loss must have been keenly felt, for his colleagues closed their play-house during a fortnight. Owing to a habit of stuttering, Joseph Béjart was an indifferent actor, but he had the commercial spirit strongly developed. In 1656, for a genealogy of the provincial nobility of Languedoc he had written, he was rewarded by that province with a grant of fifteen hundred livres; but a paltry five hundred was made to requite a supplement, and Béjart was dismissed with an admonition to indulge in no more such literary cupidity. Unabashed, however, by this rebuff, he continued grubbing money in divers ways, until he had amassed an estate valued at twenty-four thousand *écus*, a colossal fortune for a comedian.

In July, 1659, owing to the departure of his Italian competitors for Italy, Molière was left in sole possession of the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon. This enabled him to give performances on Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday, the so-called regular theatrical days. Plays were presented in the afternoon, hence, Monday being post day for Germany and Italy, Wednesday and Saturday market days, and Thursday the time of the fashionable promenade, the advantage of the regular days is apparent However, this good fortune was almost counterbalanced by the departure of the court from Paris.

France had been at war with Spain for some twenty years, and Mazarin, in negotiating peace, had in view a marriage between his sovereign and the Infanta Maria Theresa; but the ministers of Philip IV were so dilatory

that the artful cardinal set off for Lyons with the King to meet the Princess Margaret of Savoy, a possible candidate for the throne. The ruse succeeded; the Spaniards hastening to resume negotiations with the result that Maria Theresa was affianced to Louis XIV on November seventh, 1659.

The successful runs of *The Blunderer* and *The Love Tiff* terminated while these negotiations for the royal marriage were still in progress. The court being absent, Molière's audiences were considerably diminished; so, obliged to seek a novelty for autumn production, his last recourse was to his own muse. The result of this forced labour was an epoch-making play, *Les Précieuses ridicules*.

When this satirical comedy was produced at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, November eighteenth, 1659, all Paris laughed except the *précieuses*, or fashionable blue-stockings, who saw themselves portrayed. The story of this play will be left to the ensuing chapter, but it may be said in passing that the influence of the ladies, thus antagonised, was sufficient to interdict its performances for a time. The enthusiasm of the public had been too great, however, for such a ban to be effective, and in response to popular clamour *Les Précieuses ridicules* was again presented on December second. Its success was so pronounced that the price of tickets was doubled, while people came to Paris from twenty leagues around to be amused by a comedy called, by a contemporary, "the most charming and delicate which had ever appeared upon the stage." From December second, 1659, until the Easter closing of the theatre, La Grange records thirty-two performances of this piece, not counting the representations given at fashionable houses in Lent.

During the Easter holidays death removed lean Jodelet, the *fariné*, from the company, but his loss was not irreparable. Gros-René, together with his fascinating wife, returned to the fold of the Petit Bourbon, and, according to Loret, this fat comedian " was worth three Jodelets."

While *Les Précieuses ridicules* was arousing the anger of the blue-stockings, the King was in the Pyrenees, and before he could reach his capital to join in the laughter at their expense, Molière had produced *Sganarelle; or, The Imaginary Cockold* (*Sganarelle ou le Cocu imaginaire*), a one-act farce in verse, with sufficient mirth to fill the Petit Bourbon thirty-four times during the dull season and command various engagements at country houses. The merits of this piece will be discussed in a future chapter; but a word from an eye-witness upon Molière's acting in the title rôle:

Nothing more delightful had ever been seen upon the stage than Sganarelle's attitudes behind his wife's back, while his face and gestures expressed jealousy so thoroughly that speech was not needed to make him appear the most outraged of husbands.

Sighing for " the brush of a Poussin, a Le Brun, or a Mignard, to picture these drolleries," the admirer who thus expressed himself, Neufvillenaine by name, stood in the parterre until he had learned the play by heart, then rushed to a printing-office and gave it to the world. Not only did this freebooter publish *Sganarelle* from memory, but enjoined the author himself from printing it for five years. Rather than submit to such high handed robbery, Molière seized the pirated copies in the bookstalls, and sued the offender; whereupon Neuf-

villenaine published a new edition of *Sganarelle*, with a dedicatory letter to the author containing the ingenuous defence that "no harm had been done him, since his piece had been played nearly fifty times."

The Blunderer and *The Love Tiff* had not been considered worthy of publication, and even *Les Précieuses ridicules* was printed more through a desire to present a defensive preface to the public than to protect the author's rights. His experience with Monsieur Neufvillenaine taught Molière a salutary lesson, however, and thereafter his work was given to the public before it could be stolen. All thanks to this literary pirate![1]

On the seventh of June, 1660, King Louis met the Infanta Maria Theresa at the frontier; then journeying toward Paris, tarried through July and August at Vincennes. Here Molière appeared three times, playing both *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Sganarelle* with such marked success that, after the King had entered Paris in triumph with his Spanish bride, the poet was thrice summoned to the Louvre. This royal advertising was a somewhat empty boon just then, for the public was too engrossed with processions and fireworks to attend theatrical performances.

Indeed what comedy could compete with the spectacle of a royal wedding? Maria Theresa was displayed to the populace in a gilded car; young Louis, clothed in gold and silver embroidery, rode at the head of his nobility amid huzzas and acclamations. It was his first real hour of kingship and, while he tasted splendour to the full, Françoise d'Aubigné looked upon his handsome face and

[1] A reason for Molière's hesitancy regarding the publication of his plays is found in the curious law of the period, which made a published play public property for acting purposes.

envied Mazarin — until that day his ruler. This wondrous lady's hour of liberation was at hand. Within the month Scarron, her lord and master, drew his last will and testament in verse, then died. Having nothing to bequeath but jokes, he left his wife the privilege of remarrying; to Loret he bequeathed a pipe of wine; five hundred pounds of gravity for the two Corneilles, and to his other literary friends the qualities and absurdities they possessed already. Then, remembering one who had just carried theatrical Paris by storm, he left "To Molière, cuckoldom," — a legacy indeed prophetic!

Molière had need of a bequest less cynical. During the royal wedding festivities the receipts of his theatre had diminished wofully, and at the time of Scarron's death he was in a plight far more serious than playing in opposition to processions, tournaments, and fireworks. Being without fame heretofore, he had been without enemies; but when *Les Précieuses ridicules* set all Paris laughing at the expense of high society, he sowed dragons' teeth. Now, when his fortunes seemed waning, foes sprang full armed to his attack.

On October eleventh Monsieur de Ratabon, superintendent of the royal buildings, began to destroy the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon without warning to its occupants. Dumfounded by this unforeseen attack, Molière complained to the King; whereupon the official justified his action by stating that the building stood in the way of proposed improvements to the Louvre, while the stage fixtures, having been built for the royal ballets, belonged to his Majesty. As La Grange ingenuously remarks, "the evil intention of Monsieur de Ratabon was apparent," and doubtless powerful social leaders, resenting

Les Précieuses ridicules, inspired this covert attack upon its author. The King bore no such enmity, and when his brother asked for the theatre in the Palais Royal to indemnify his comedians for the wrong done them, his Majesty granted the request, and ordered the offending Ratabon to make the necessary repairs.

Built in 1639 by Richelieu to gratify his passion for the stage, this theatre had fallen into such a state of ruin since the Palais Cardinal had become the Palais Royal, that three beams had rotted and half the auditorium was unroofed; but being the property of the King, Molière could not be molested there except by royal command. Occupying the right wing of the palace, it had its entrance in the rue St. Honoré near where the Théâtre Français now stands, and was, according to Sauval, "the most comfortable theatre ever known." This authority maintains that it held four thousand spectators, but in Molière's day its seating capacity must have been greatly reduced. Karl Mantzius thus transcribes the contemporary descriptions of the auditorium:

The hall was a long parallelogram, with the stage at one end; the floor ascended gradually in the opposite direction by means of twenty-seven low, broad stone steps, on which stood wooden seats. The steps did not curve, but crossed the whole breadth of the hall in a straight line, and ran up to a kind of portico at the back of the hall formed of three large arcades. Along each side two gilded balconies ran from the portico to within a short distance of the proscenium. The actual stage did not occupy the whole breadth of the hall, but formed a kind of large, flat arch supported by two pillars of masonry, which on the sides facing the audience were decorated with Ionian pilasters, while the sides that faced each other contained each two niches with allegorical

statues. From the stage six steps led down to the seats on the floor, and at the top, in the middle of the arch, was Richelieu's coat-of-arms.[1]

Although, to hasten the repairs, Molière asked permission to remove the boxes and stage appliances from the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon to his new theatre, the King's machinist kept the latter under the pretext that they would be useful at the Tuileries, then promptly burnt them. Court officials and ladies of quality were not alone in their hostility; Molière's rivals at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, seeing the stage of the Petit Bourbon taken from under his feet, tried to spread sedition in his company by offering more lucrative positions to its members, but they did not know their man. Witness this tribute of La Grange:

All the actors loved their chief, Le Sieur de Molière, who, besides being worthy and extraordinarily capable, was so honest and had such engaging manners that they felt obliged, one and all, to protest their loyalty, and vow they would follow his fortunes, no matter what inducements or advantages might be found elsewhere.

These words, written by a comrade at a moment when Molière's fortunes were ebbing, paint his character in unmistakable colours. "All the actors loved their chief" — no modern eulogy is needed.

During the three months while Molière was without a play-house, his troupe appeared occasionally in private houses and at the Louvre. These performances brought five thousand one hundred and fifteen livres, but the

[1] *Molière and his Times: The Theatre in France in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. IV, *History of Theatrical Art.*

major portion being expended on the new theatre, the comedians were on short commons. The company was a mutual benefit association, in which each member received one share of the net receipts. The only divergence from this rule was the allotment of an extra share to Molière at the time of his marriage in 1661, and another in 1663, in recognition of his rights as author, — a modest compensation, indeed, for one who filled the triple rôle of play writer, manager, and star. An annual pension of one thousand livres was paid a retiring actor by his successor, and, in case of death, a like sum was given the nearest kinsman; hence membership in the company included both a disability pension and a life insurance.

After each performance the *chambrée*, or money received, was counted, and, when expenses had been deducted, divided among the players. The receipts fluctuated greatly. Often falling below one hundred livres, they dwindled, on March ninth, 1660, to the mere pittance of forty; yet on March fifth, 1669, at the first public production of *The Hypocrite*, they reached the phenomenal sum of two thousand eight hundred and sixty livres, and frequently passed the thousand mark.[1] As the charge for admission depended much upon the success of a piece, it is difficult to present an accurate scale of prices. The various parts of the house were known as stage seats, lower tier boxes, amphitheatre, upper boxes, third tier boxes, and parterre. The first three of these divisions were the most desirable, and the price of seats therein, the same. Three livres was the ordinary charge, but when a successful piece held the boards, the *demi-louis d'or* — or

[1] *Registre de la Grange.*

five livres ten sous — was demanded in the fashionable portions of the house. For the *parterre*, or pit, fifteen sous was the normal charge; but when the prices were doubled, as on the occasion of the second representation of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, thirty sous was asked for the privilege of standing amid the *hoi polloi*.[1]

The King's musketeers were "dead heads," the stage seats of the dandy nobles seldom paid for, and Monsieur's subvention a will-o'-the-wisp; so Molière's most reliable source of revenue was the patronage of the bourgeoisie. Although his rivals at the Hôtel de Bourgogne drew annually from the royal treasury a pension of twelve thousand livres, and the Italians drew fifteen thousand, Molière, during the first eight years of his sojourn in Paris, had no such good fortune. Still the lot of a comedian in his company was not to be despised, for La Grange, from the time he became a member until the poet's death — a period of fourteen years — received the sum of fifty-one thousand six hundred and seventy livres as his share of the receipts, an amount a modern actor might envy.

Although his name was not yet on the royal pension list, Molière possessed his King's regard — a far more valuable asset. He had called him "the greatest monarch in the world," and when the young man of twenty thus flattered was amused as well, Molière's fortune was assured. In that complaisant age the King's favour was essential to any man whose livelihood depended on the public. To Molière it meant far more, for it gave him the courage to paint society in the unerring colours of truth, and when his company was homeless, financial support as well: for example, between October eleventh,

[1] *Le Théâtre français sous Louis XIV* by Eugène Despois.

1660, and January twentieth of the following year — the period when he was without a theatre — his company played at court six times, while the troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne appeared but once.

One of these command performances is of more than passing interest. On October twenty-sixth, 1660, Molière's troupe went to the Louvre to present *The Blunderer* and *Les Précieuses ridicules*. "Monsieur le Cardinal Mazarin was ill," says La Grange, "and his Majesty saw the comedy while resting on the back of his Eminence's chair"; in a word, a young king on the threshold of his power, his dying master, and his hired player, — the greatest despot, the greatest knave, and the greatest genius of France.

VII

LES PRÉCIEUSES RIDICULES

Until the eventful afternoon when *Les Précieuses ridicules* was produced at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, the term *précieuse* had meant a woman of cultivation truly precious. It became thenceforth an obloquy. To appreciate how vulnerable to satire were the ladies who had gloried in that title, their story must be told.

During the religious wars the manners of society had been those of the camp. At their close Catherine de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet, a social leader of unequalled talent, re-created French refinement; yet so far reaching has been the effect of Molière's comedy that she is often classed with her copyists as a *précieuse ridicule*. Besides being ambitious and tactful, this remarkable woman was actively virtuous, — a merit which led her to head a reaction against the coarseness of contemporary court life, and revive a taste for true culture among the idle born.

Rebuilding her *hôtel* in the rue St. Thomas du Louvre[1] with this end in view, she discarded the customary central stairway, and substituted for the single vast and dreary salon of the period a series of antechambers and cabinets. In her drawing-room the con-

[1] Situated on the site now occupied by the *Grands Magazins du Louvre*.

ventional shades of red and tan colour were rejected, and the blue velvet furnishings installed which gave it the name of the Blue Room, *le salon bleu*. When its doors were thrown open to the wit and beauty of Paris, French verse rose from the mire of tavern song to the dignity of poetry. Richelieu's condescension had made the writer's lot intolerable; but Madame de Rambouillet received the humblest author on a plane of equality with the grandest seigneur.

During its career of more than forty years (1617–65), the Hôtel de Rambouillet passed through three well defined phases. In the period of formation its famous coterie was animated by youthful enthusiasm. Mme. de Rambouillet was in the charming thirties; Julie, her eldest daughter, and Madeleine de Scudéry were just budding into womanhood; Vaugelas, Racan, Jean Louis de Balzac, Chapelain, and Voiture ranged in age from thirty-five to twenty-two. Imperious Malherbe alone was old and crusty; yet even he unbent so far as to contrive the poetic anagram of Arthénice from the Christian name of his hostess.

The assumption of fantastic *noms de Parnasse* was a feature of preciosity, so credit for inventing that cult might be given Malherbe; but in those earlier days affectation played small part at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. To quote Chapelain, "In no other place in the world was there more good sense and less pedantry." Conversation was cultivated as a fine art, and literature discussed with such intelligence that authors stood in honest dread of the Blue Room coterie's verdict. Moreover, new words were introduced into the language, superfluous letters suppressed, obscure points argued, and terms defined which were soon to find a place in the dictionary

of the French Academy;[1] in short, through one charming woman's tact, the poet and the scholar replaced the swashbuckler as a social influence.

Restraining Malherbe died in 1628, whereupon Erudition, that just god, was deposed by Verbiage. Sarrasin, Conrart, Patru, Godeau, Ménage, Benserade, and Segrais became the acolytes of High Priest Voiture, arbiter of elegance; Mlle. de Coligny and Mlle. de Scudéry, the Princesse de Guéméné, the Marquise de Sablé, and the Comtesse de Maure were among his devotees; even the great Condé, Saint-Évremond, and La Rochefoucauld bent the knee. Garlands of verses were entwined in daughter Julie's honour; young Bossuet preached experimental sermons in the Blue Room; Corneille read tragedies; but, alas, circumlocution dominated the ritual of its culture worship. Still, Voiture's sonnets and roundelays were charming poetry, his *al fresco* fêtes distinguished for good taste: not until his death did preciosity become ridiculous.

The third phase is the period of decline. In 1645 Julie d'Angennes, Madame de Rambouillet's eldest daughter, married a persistent nobleman,[2] whose austerity chilled the Blue Room atmosphere; and Voiture died three years later. Then the Fronde divided society into bitter factions, and family deaths closed the doors of the Hôtel de Rambouillet for a time; the subsequent illness of its hostess, too, although accountable for

[1] The French Academy was founded officially by Richelieu in 1635. Many of its members, however, had been meeting for some years previous at the house of Conrart, an *habitue* of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. One of its first labours was the compilation of an authoritative dictionary of the French language.

[2] The Marquis de Montausier, created Duc de Montausier in 1664.

the quaint custom of receiving guests at the *ruelle*, or bedside, restricted its coterie to her intimate friends. After the wars of the Fronde the Blue Room was reopened, but Madame de Rambouillet was verging on seventy. Claimants for her social throne appeared — to emulate but not to equal her in brilliancy — and in the salons of these rivals the preciosity that Molière satirised was born, — a base imitation of the Blue Room culture.

Among these competitors was Madeleine de Scudéry, whose novel, *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649-53), appeared about the time the mysterious word *précieuse* was first whispered from lip to lip. This interminable story portrayed the Blue Room familiars in the guise of classic heroes, and its success was so marked that its old maid author resolved to secede from the Hôtel de Rambouillet and embark in leadership herself. When the languishments and love maps of *Artamène's* ten-volume successor, *Clélie* (1656), created a maudlin craze throughout feminine Paris, Mlle. de Scudéry's salon in the rue de Beauce became the consecrated temple of preciosity.

Socially ambitious women were early proselytes of the new cult. Knowing the futility of storming the exclusive Hôtel de Rambouillet, they concentrated their attacks upon the weaker stronghold, and in their zeal for refinement endeavoured to annex the entire realm of knowledge: if Mlle. de Scudéry's salon was lacking in distinction, it certainly made up for it in frenzy. In the rue St. Thomas du Louvre, preciosity had been a creditable avoidance of distasteful terms, — a literary movement no more pronounced than the euphuism of Sidney and Lyly, less so than that of Gongora in Spain or Marini in Italy, — but in the rue de Beauce it became an absurd neology and the cult of extravagant words.

Imagine a fashion demanding circumlocutory quirks in ordinary conversation, such as "defiers of the weather" for hats, "indispensables of conversation" for chairs, "furniture of the mouth" for teeth, "pearls of Iris" for tears, and "gates of the understanding" for ears; yet such was the preciosity of Mlle. de Scudéry's disciples. Moreover, it was not confined to love-lorn spinsters or to new women; for each *précieuse* had her *alcôviste*, or attendant cavalier, and precious verbiage was designed, above all, adequately to express the tender passion.

There were several degrees of *précieuses* — *les illustres, les grandes, et les petites* — and in Parisian society a *précieuse illustre* took rank as a duchess at court. In the capital the disciples of the new ritual performed just such antics of culture as did the æsthetes in England a quarter of a century ago, and in the provinces, where Parisian manners were aped by all foolish women, the pranks of the *précieuses* passed all reason.

This was the state in which preciosity found itself when Molière reached Paris in the autumn of 1658. He was no stranger to the cult, for it had already penetrated Languedoc; furthermore, Sarrasin, the poet-secretary of the Prince de Conti, was a familiar of the Blue Room and the successor of Voiture as arbiter of elegance. The influence of such a man upon a provincial court must have been paramount; and when Molière took part in the *Ballet of the Incompatibles* at Montpellier in 1655, he doubtless met many ridiculous *précieuses*, any one of whom might have inspired his comedy. Indeed, Grimarest states that *Les Précieuses ridicules* was first played in the provinces; while Roederer[1] places its production at Béziers in 1654.

[1] *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la société polie en France.*

La Grange and Vinot, on the other hand, assert in the Preface of 1682 that "M. de Molière made (*fit*) the comedy of *Les Précieuses ridicules* in 1659," while the former, in his *Register*, calls it the poet's "third new piece." Roederer's arguments being far from conclusive and Grimarest a much discredited authority, this point is still a mooted one. Molière's *précieuses*, however, are ladies from the provinces, and it remained his habit to make use of scenes and characters from his earlier pieces; therefore it is reasonable to suspect that *Les Précieuses ridicules* was a provincial *canevas*, embellished and reconstructed for Parisian use.

Chapelle and Bachaumont, after their journey through the South in 1656, composed a satire on the ways of country *précieuses* which, it is more than likely, Molière had seen; that same year, too, the Abbé de Pure published a novel called *The Précieuse; or, The Mystery of the Alcove* (*La Précieuse ou le Mystère de la ruelle*), and a play by him on a similar topic was presented by the Italians at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon. Indeed, Molière's contemporaries openly accused him of stealing his idea from this churchman, — a false accusation, of course, if his comedy had been first played in the provinces.

Les Précieuses ridicules, as has been seen, was produced at the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon with marked success on November eighteenth, 1659, and so antagonised the real *précieuses* that the author was forced to withdraw it for a fortnight. Now, as the reader is already aware, these ladies were the society leaders of that day; so it must be admitted that in ridiculing the foibles of his most influential patrons Molière, still a man comparatively unknown, was playing a bold game. This courage,

displayed at the moment when it was necessary to secure his precarious hold upon the public, shows that talent for aggressive leadership which became thenceforth so dominant a feature of his character. In this discussion, however, the play itself is being overlooked. The story is simple, but a sufficient framework for delicious satire. A word upon its construction:

Magdelon[1] and Cathos, newly come to Paris from the provinces, are respectively daughter and niece to Gorgibus, and have been provided by that worthy bourgeois with a pair of honest suitors, called La Grange and Du Croisy. Although unacquainted with the great world except through Mlle. de Scudéry's vapid pages, these young ladies assume the airs and graces of full-fledged *précieuses*, and scorn their admirers for having the effrontery to propose matrimony point-blank, instead of proceeding discreetly in accordance with precious standards, by *billets doux*, *petits soins*, *billets galants*, *et jolis vers*.

Enraged at being jilted by such upstarts, La Grange and Du Croisy plan a cruel revenge. The former has a valet named Mascarille, who, as he says, "can pass in the eyes of most people for a fine wit — since nothing is cheaper nowadays than cleverness"; so this fellow, dressed in extravagant finery and bearing the grandiloquent name of the Marquis de Mascarille, is borne by chairmen into the very house of these imperious country ladies, there to pass himself off as a wit and beau of society. Deceived by his ribbons and his ready tongue, both Magdelon and Cathos fall an easy prey to his blandishments; and flattered by the attentions of one so influential at court as Mascarille pretends to be, they consider

[1] This is the spelling of the earlier editions of Molière's works, the name being first printed as Madelon in the edition of 1734.

their social fortunes made. To abet his fellow-servant's knavery and complete the head-turning of the ridiculous *précieuses*, Du Croisy's valet presents himself as the Vicomte de Jodelet, *un brave à trois poils* — or fashionable fire-eater; but at the moment when these rascals are celebrating their triumph by music and an impromptu dance, their masters appear to strip the foppish doublets from their backs. Before the humiliated ladies who preferred their lackeys to themselves, La Grange and Du Croisy give the pair a sound beating; Mascarille, robbed of his finery and sore from his blows, thus bemoans his fate to his fellow victim:

Is this the way to treat a marquess? But it is the way of the world. The slightest disgrace makes those who petted us despise us. Come, comrade, let's seek our fortunes elsewhere. They care for nothing here but vain appearances: virtue unadorned has no consideration.

Upon this canvas Molière painted a caricature of polite society. The antics of preciosity had passed all bounds of intelligence; so his subject appealed to every sane mind. Even though his *précieuses* were nobodies from the provinces, and his *alcôviste* a masquerading servant, the shaft went home because its aim was true. Magdelon and Cathos languished and sighed like the real *précieuses*, and their talk was just as maudlin. Take, for instance, the former's protest to her father against the boorish love-making of La Grange and Du Croisy:

My cousin will tell you, father, as well as I, that matrimony ought never to happen till after other adventures. A lover, to be agreeable, must know how to express fine sentiments; to breathe soft, tender, and passionate vows; his courtship, too, must be according to the rules. In the first place, he should behold the fair creature with whom

he falls in love at a place of worship, when out walking, or at some public ceremony; or else he should be introduced to her by a relative or a friend — as if by chance; and when he leaves her presence, he should appear pensive and downcast. For a time he hides his passion from the object of his admiration; but, when paying her visits, he should never fail to present some question of gallantry to be discussed by all the wits present. When the moment of his declaration arrives — which usually should be contrived in some shady walk with the company at a distance — it must be quickly followed by anger, shown by our blushing, sufficient to banish the lover from our presence for a time. He soon finds means, however, to appease our resentment and gradually accustom us to his tender avowals, as well as to draw that confession from our lips which causes us so much pain. Then follow vicissitudes: rivals who cross the path of our mutual love, parental persecution, unfounded jealousies, complaints, despair, abductions, and all that follows. Thus are such matters arranged in fashionable society, and true gallantry cannot dispense with these forms. But to come out point-blank with a proposal of marriage — to make love with a marriage contract, and begin a novel at the wrong end! Once more, father, nothing could be more tradesman-like, and the mere thought of it makes me sick at heart.

Surely there are many foolish girl novel readers in the twentieth century whose conception of the art of love-making is not unlike Magdelon's. Indeed, Molière's characterisation and dialogue display such a modern quality that *Les Précieuses ridicules* might readily be edited so as to become a skit upon the "smart set" of Paris, London, or New York. Take, for instance, this bit in which the masquerading servant Mascarille impresses the country *précieuses* with his metropolitan airs:

MASCARILLE

Well, ladies, what say you of Paris?

MAGDELON

Alas, what can we say? Not to confess that Paris is the main office of wonders, the centre of good manners, taste, and wit, one must be the antipode of rational.

MASCARILLE

As for me, I maintain that outside Paris there is no salvation for right-minded people.

CATHOS

A truth most indisputable.

MASCARILLE

Of course, it is rather muddy, but then we have the sedan.

MAGDELON

True; the sedan is a marvellous curtailment of the insults of both mud and inclement weather.

If the word automobile were substituted for sedan in the foregoing, it would be difficult to believe Mascarille was not a present-day valet masquerading as *un homme du dernier chic*. Again, when he is calling attention to his dress, his conceit is not unlike the modern French dandy who instead of ribbons from Perdrigeon's wears ties from the rue de la Paix.

MASCARILLE

What do you think of my finery? Is it in keeping with my coat?

CATHOS

Perfectly!

MASCARILLE

A well selected ribbon, eh?

MAGDELON

Tremendously well selected — real Perdrigeon.

MASCARILLE

What have you to say of my *canons?*

MAGDELON

They have quite an air!

MASCARILLE

I may boast that they are a quarter wider than any yet made.

CATHOS

I am forced to confess that I have never seen exquisite taste in dress carried so far.

MASCARILLE

Kindly apply to these gloves the reflection of your sense of smell.

MAGDELON

They smell terribly well.

CATHOS

I have never inhaled a more delicate scent.

MASCARILLE

(*Presenting his curled wig to be smelt.*) And this?

MAGDELON

It is perfect in quality! It penetrates charmingly the sublimity of one's brain.

MASCARILLE

You have n't said anything about my feathers. How do you find them?

CATHOS

Terribly beautiful!

MASCARILLE

Do you know that each sprig cost me a gold louis; but, above all, it is my mania to wish everything of the very best.

MAGDELON

I assure you, we have tastes in common, you and I; for I have a frantic delicacy regarding what I wear. Even to my stockings, I can't endure anything that is not made by a skilled workwoman.[1]

[1] The ribbon referred to by Mascarille was the favour worn upon the shoulder or breast of his doublet — an article brought into fashion by

By substituting "tie" for ribbon in this dialogue, "spats" for *canons*, and "top-hat" for feathers, Mascarille's language might readily be that of a modern popinjay. Indeed, middle class young ladies who ape society manners and servants who fancy themselves above their station are such perennial types that to this day *Les Précieuses ridicules* never fails to call forth peals of laughter. Imagine, then, the sensation it created when the very people ridiculed were seated in the boxes! The dialogue between the false marquess and his precious dupes might have passed for a model conversation at one of Mlle. de Scudéry's Saturdays; flowery love verse, too, received its *coup de grâce* when languishing Mascarille composed this impromptu quatrain in tribute to Magdelon:

> Oh, oh! quite careless of your charm,
> My heart, without a thought of harm,
> Is slyly filched by glances lief —
> Stop thief, stop thief, stop thief, stop thief!

Too many poets had indulged in superfine expression of the tender passion, too many butterflies of society had figured in the rôle of *alcôviste*, for the fashionable playgoer not to appreciate Moliére's satire even though it cut to the quick. Henceforth a *précieuse* — whether

Mazarin's sumptuary decree of 1644, prohibiting the use, not only of point lace, but gold, silver, and copper lace (*clinquant*) as well. *Canons* were the canions, or ruffles, worn at the end of the *haut de chausses*, or loose breeches, just where they joined the *bas de bottes*, or boot-hose. At the time of Mascarille's first appearance they were wide rolls of starched linen such as were said by a writer of the period to so resemble paper lanterns that "one evening a laundress of the royal palace made use of one to protect her candle from the wind." Mascarille's feathers were the dozen or more ostrich plumes which ornamented his broad felt hat.

illustrious, great, or small — could not fail to be ridiculous as well.

The simple announcement of its title should have been sufficient to make Molière's new comedy create a flutter in society; but the author evidently did not foresee its phenomenal success, else he would not have presented it as a mere after-piece to tragedy. The *orateur*, too, must have failed lamentably in advertising its sensational merits; for the receipts at the first production were but five hundred and thirty-three livres; while, at the second, with the prices doubled, fourteen hundred were realised. Nevertheless, many distinguished people were present at the first performance; for in *Ménagiana*, a collection of the sayings and criticisms of Gilles Ménage, published shortly after that writer's death, we learn that " Mlle. de Rambouillet was there, together with Mme. de Grignan, M. Chapelain, and the entire Hôtel de Rambouillet set."

The Mme. de Grignan here mentioned was one of Mme. de Rambouillet's five daughters. Her more celebrated sister, Julie, had married the Marquis de Montausier fourteen years previously, while her three remaining sisters were nuns; but Mme. de Rambouillet herself lived only a few doors from the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon, and though past seventy was far from being too infirm to attend an afternoon performance of a play the title of which should have piqued her curiosity; so it seems far more likely that *Mlle.* is a proof-reader's error for *Mme.*, than that Ménage or his editors made the extraordinary mistake of calling the Marquise de Montausier Mlle. de Rambouillet.

Somaize, the historian of preciosity, chronicles that

after the first production of *Les Précieuses*, "an influential *alcôviste* interdicted that spectacle for several days;"[1] but Mme. de Rambouillet was a woman of too much sense and good taste to have incited this persecution. Barely three years later she invited Molière to her *hôtel* — a proof that she bore him little malice; and if she was present at the first performance of his satire on the foibles of her silly imitators, one is tempted to believe she shared the prescience which Ménage's admiring editors impute to him:

> The piece was received with general applause, and I [Ménage], in particular, was so satisfied with it that I immediately perceived the effect it would produce. On leaving the theatre, I took M Chapelain by the hand and said, "Monsieur, you and I have approved all the stupidities which have just been criticised so cleverly and with such good sense; but, believe me — to quote what Saint-Remy said to Clovis — 'We must burn what we have adored, and adore what we have burnt.'"

Les Précieuses ridicules sounded the death knell of affectation on the stage as well as in society. Accustomed to classic tragedy or Italian farce, the audience could scarcely believe its lifelike characters were in a play. Their very names, too, were those of the actors on the stage: Magdelon was Madeleine Béjart; Cathos, Catherine de Brie;[2] La Grange and Du Croisy, the new recruits of that name. Jodelet, the lean *farinê* from the Théâtre du Marais, with sombre doublet buttoned to his chin in the style of the old court, and a huge false beard

[1] *Le Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses.*

[2] M. Aimé-Martin arbitrarily allots the rôle of Magdelon to Mlle. de Brie, and that of Cathos to Mlle. du Parc; but in the case of the latter, he is manifestly in error, as she was not a member of the company at the time.

upon his whitened face, played the Vicomte de Jodelet; while Mascarille, the swaggering, insolent, masquerading valet in love with his own vanity, was Molière himself.[1]

Mlle. des Jardins — an eye-witness of that first performance — thus describes Molière's droll make-up:

His wig was so huge that it swept the stage every time he bowed, and his hat so small that it is easy to imagine that the marquess carried it in his hand more often than upon his head. His cravat suggested a seemly dressing-gown; and his canons seemed made for children to play hide-and-seek in. . . . A bunch of tassels dangled from his pocket as if it were a horn of plenty; and his shoes were so covered with ribbons that you could not tell whether they were Russia leather, English calf-skin, or Morocco; at all events, I know they were at least half a foot in height, and I found it hard to understand how heels so high and slender could carry the weight of the marquess, his ribbons, canons, and powder.[2]

The success of the play was instantaneous. According to tradition, an old man in the audience cried out: "Courage, Molière, that is real comedy!" — a verdict upheld by posterity. If Molière's victory was complete, still he paid the customary penalty of depreciation and petty annoyance. His piece was stolen from the Abbé de Pure, said jealous rivals, or found among the papers of Guillot-Gorju (a dead comedian of the Hôtel de Bourgogne);[3] and the reader already knows the story of the

[1] Molière was then known upon the stage as Mascarille; for Somaize, in the preface of his comedy *Les Véritables précieuses*, calls the author *Mascarille*, and dismisses him contemptuously as "one whose acting has pleased enough people for him to be sufficiently vain to boast of being the chief *farceur* of France."

[2] *Récit en prose et en vers de la farce des Précieuses.*

[3] *Le Cercle des femmes* by Chappuzeau and *Jodelet ou le Maître valet*

official persecution which resulted in the loss of his theatre.

He made more than one attempt to mollify the enraged *précieuses*, and even went so far, in 1660, as to present a comedy by another author entitled *The True and the False Précieuse* (*La Vraye et fausse précieuse*); while in the preface to his own play he is careful to say that —

> The most commendable things are frequently aped by vulgar monkeys who deserve to be flouted; and these vicious imitations of the best have in all ages been the subject of comedy . . . so the genuine *précieuses* would be wrong to take offence when I make game of the ridiculous people who imitate them so badly.

This attempted pacification of his enemies was merely diplomacy. "It is my belief," he said at a later day, "that, for a man in my position,[1] I can do no better than attack the vices of my time with ridiculous likenesses." *Les Précieuses ridicules* was his first skirmish in this war against the false. In subsequent years he never let pass a favourable opportunity to marshal his mental forces in unremitting hostility to the hypocrites and formalists of his day; for Molière, the poet militant, was a master strategist.

In *Segraisiana*, a miscellany of the sayings and recollections of Segrais, the poet, published in 1721, Molière is reputed to have said, after the success of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, that "it was no longer necessary for him to

by Scarron are plays from which Molière may have culled ideas for his comedy.

[1] This statement is found in the first petition Molière presented to the King for permission to play *Le Tartuffe* in public. *Dans l'emploi où je me trouve* are his words, and they are held by commentators to refer to his position as comic poet.

study Plautus and Terence or pluck from the fragments of Menander." "I need study only society," was his boast; but as it is recorded over half a century after the triumph which called it forth, one is tempted to doubt the chronicler's veracity. Molière was too modest ever to have played the rôle of fanfaron; so, like the story of the old man in the *parterre*, this swaggering should be interpreted rather as the verdict of time than as an actual occurrence.

It was indeed true that he need study only society; for *Les Précieuses ridicules*, as has been stated in an earlier chapter, was the first real comedy of manners. Being a one-act play in prose, full of exaggeration and drollery, it is farcical in construction, so technically it must be classed with the poet's light buffooneries; but in the sense that it is a dramatic picture of life, this trifling farce becomes pure comedy. In characterisation, too, it is a dramatic landmark. Heretofore French dramatists had slavishly imitated classic or Italian models; in *Les Précieuses ridicules* a new dramatic note was sounded, — the note of truth.

During the preceding century the Seigneur de Montaigne, a country gentleman, who, in his own words, "had done no more than nibble at the outside crust of learning," began to write what he termed "essays," in a style intended as a protest against the stilted and artificial literature of the day. According to his own estimation, "he wrote a little of everything, and nothing complete — in true French fashion"; but he took a fair and comprehensive view of life, and through that very quality of truth became unconsciously the Dean of modern letters. One cannot read him without being impressed with the modernness of his point of view;

nor can one see Molière played without feeling that, in spite of their ribbons, *canons*, and feathered fans, his characters are the men and women whom we meet daily. Their talk is quaint, maybe, but their ambitions, foibles, and philosophy of life are modern.

Naturalness, the very quality that distinguishes Montaigne, constitutes the charm of Molière's work. Our poet knew humanity in all its phases, and being blessed with the courage of his convictions, he too wrote in protest against the stilted and artificial, "in true French fashion." Until *Les Précieuses ridicules* appeared, he was bound by Italian fetters, but henceforth he was steadfast in his Gallic loyalty. If at moments his work became objectively Italian, his point of view was subjective, his technic French. Truth was his ideal; and with *Les Précieuses ridicules* as foundation, he built from the farcical ruins of the past his eternal city, — a Rome to which the roads of modern comedy all lead.

VIII

THE END OF APPRENTICESHIP

In *Les Précieuses ridicules* transalpine Mascarille appears as a naturalised Frenchman, but Molière was verging on forty when this play was produced, and needed a vehicle less sprightly for his talent; so Sganarelle was created to supplant his predecessor. A homely bourgeois, through and through, with all the prejudice, thrift, and cunning of his class, this riper character bears but slight relation to Zanarello, his Italian namesake. Like Shakespeare's Falstaff, or the Sancho of Cervantes, he belongs to his creator. If from time to time he savours of the creations of Rabelais or Scarron, it is only because he, too, is thoroughly human.

The Flying Physician, it is true, contained a character of that name, but this personage was merely a rogue with the attributes of Mascarille; the real Sganarelle is first met with in the one-act rhymed farce bearing his name. Thereafter, a Frenchman to the bone, he reappears in *The School for Husbands* (*L'École des maris*), *The Forced Marriage* (*Le Mariage forcé*), *Don Juan; or, The Feast of Stone* (*Don Juan ou le festin de pierre*), and *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*.

Sganarelle; or, The Imaginary Cuckold (*Sganarelle, ou le Cocu imaginaire*), the one-act vehicle of his first real appearance, is replete with rapid action; but to present

the plot in its entirety would only bewilder the reader. It is enough to say that false appearances lead jealous, self-sufficient, bourgeois Sganarelle to believe his wife is faithless, and a pair of guileless lovers each to regard the other as the cause of his unhappiness, in a way so ingenious and plausible that the reader's sympathies are commanded to a degree seldom accorded to characters so fatuous. Written wholly in a spirit of raillery, this farce may be accepted as a protest against the insipid romantic school, — a resurrection of primitive Gallic wit. It is so cleverly constructed that, by the mere substitution of spirited colloquial prose for its somewhat antiquated and often ribald verse, it might serve as a modern "curtain raiser"; while its sentiments are so far from being archaic that, in the following diatribe against husbands delivered by Sganarelle's wife, George Meredith may be said to be antedated by nearly two centuries and a half in his plea for easy divorce:

> To be a marvel for a day
> Is but a husband's usual way;
> Love's troth he'll plight with ardent fire,
> But of caresses soon will tire.
> Then the base traitor scorns our charms
> For solace in another's arms.
> Ah, me! if woman might concert
> A change of husbands as of skirt.

With *Les Précieuses ridicules* Molière planted the standard of truth upon the ramparts of the false. To renew hostilities against the privileged classes would have been bad generalship, so he used the broad humour of *Sganarelle* to make his enemies forget the stinging satire of its predecessor. However, he did not escape the usual charge of plagiarism: Louis Riccoboni — an eigh-

teenth century writer who denies originality to all but three of his comedies — pronounces *Sganarelle* an adaptation of an Italian farce, called *The Portrait; or, Harlequin Horned by Opinion* (*Il Ritratto ovvero Arlechino cornuto per opinione*).[1] As this piece is first known to have been played in 1716, its priority should be established before it is presented as Sganarelle's original; for, to quote Monsieur Louis Moland, "The assertions of Riccoboni and the wiseacres who have followed in his footsteps have been accepted altogether too readily."[2] The popular success of *Sganarelle* has been noted in an earlier chapter; it is only necessary to add that of all its author's plays it was the one most frequently performed before the King.

Returning for the moment to events, Molière's renovated theatre in the Palais Royal was opened on the twentieth of January, 1661. This gave him a playhouse of his own, one destined to be his theatrical home until his death. Although he shared it with the Italians when they returned to France, they were the tenants, he the landlord; the regular theatrical days belonged to him. This new theatre was opened with a double bill consisting of *The Love Tiff* and *Sganarelle;* but a piece was already in rehearsal which Molière felt would establish his reputation as a dramatist of the first order, — a belief destined to be rudely shattered.

At the time of the King's wedding a troupe of Spanish actors had been received with considerable friendliness by the Parisian stage, though the public held aloof. Their advent, however, created a taste for the Spanish drama among literary people, and was apparently

[1] *Observations sur la Comédie et sur le génie de Molière.*

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Molière,* Vol. II.

not without effect upon Molière; for in attempting the one serious drama of his career he chose a Spanish subject. *Don Garcia of Navarre; or, The Jealous Prince* (*Don Garcie de Navarre ou le Prince jaloux*)[1] was the name of this venturesome effort. It was presented at the Palais Royal, February fourth, 1661, proving so lamentable a failure that only seven public performances were given.

This ill-fated play was the outcome of Molière's love for tragedy, — a futile attempt to scale dramatic mountain tops. His experience might have shown him that truth is the straightest path to the highest art; but instead of painting human nature with the inimitable touch of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, he resorted to heroics, and composed a tragi-comedy or reconciliation drama (*Versöhnungs-drama*, the Germans style it), which, being neither tragedy nor comedy, fell like most attempts of the kind between two stools. Jealousy, made ridiculous in *Sganarelle*, became a noble passion in *Don Garcia;* but Molière's tedious prince is too suspicious and too unreasonable to be sympathised with; misunderstood Elvire, his lady-love, far too exemplary to be diverting; so this drama of exalted jealousy is dull to a degree, and moreover never rises to a tragic climax. The story of its failure can be no more tersely told than by Voltaire:

Molière played the rôle of Don Garcia; and this play taught him that, as an actor, he had no talent for the serious. Both the drama and Molière's acting were very badly received. This piece, drawn from the Span-

[1] In the seventeenth century the Spanish word *Don* was written *Dom* in France, — a word nearer the Latin *Dominus* in form, and still in use in Portugal.

ish, has never been presented since its failure. Molière's budding reputation suffered much from this disgrace, and his enemies triumphed for a time.[1]

Voltaire, like other commentators, arbitrarily attributes *Don Garcia* to a Spanish source; but, in view of its resemblance to an Italian comedy of jealousy by Andrea Cicognini,[2] it would seem to be Spanish only in subject. It proved a failure so complete that La Grange disdained to credit its authorship to his chief; yet to the modern reader it is not devoid of charm. Indeed, when judged with regard to dreariness, it compares so favourably with other tragi-comedies of that period that one is tempted to agree with M. Mesnard[3] in believing that its failure was in some measure due to its author's acting in the title-rôle, — a point made apparent by Mascarille's contention in *Les Précieuses ridicules* that "the great comedians are alone capable of giving things their true value." "The others," that rogue continues, "are ignoramuses, who recite as they talk and don't know how to roar their verses." Now, the "great comedians" referred to by Mascarille were the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne; "the others," Molière's own company; so if the poet recited *Don Garcia's* turgid lines in natural tones, his performance, howsoever artistic it might appear to us, must have been distasteful to an audience accustomed to actors who "roared" their verses.

Still, Molière did not lay ponderous *Don Garcia of Navarre* aside without one final effort to demonstrate his own belief in it. Six months subsequent to its failure he played it before the King, and after three further

[1] *Vie de Moliere, avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.*

[2] *Le Gelosie fortunate del principe Rodrigo.*

[3] *Œuvres de Molière.*

attempts to make it please the court tried it once more at the Palais Royal; but the first verdict of the public stood as final. He accepted this universal condemnation, then, by refusing to have it printed; but later made use of certain of its sentiments and verses in *The Learned Women*, *Amphitryon*, and *The Hypocrite*. Furthermore, *Don Garcia* was the herald of a masterpiece. After its author had himself suffered the pangs of jealousy and learned beyond peradventure that truth was the road and comedy the vehicle for his genius, he wrote *The Misanthrope*, a play inspired by the same ideals as its sombre predecessor, but resembling it little more in craftsmanship than a masterful statue resembles a tombstone.

The groping period of outlines, sketches, and *coups d'essais* with which Molière experimented on the public and himself ended with *Don Garcia of Navarre*. Realising his limitations, he now began to specialise his genius, and utter failure never crossed his path again. His apprenticeship terminated at the very moment when the young King, freed from tutelage, began to rule. Mazarin died at Vincennes, March ninth, 1661; and when the president of the assembly of the clergy asked to whom he should address himself in future upon affairs of state, Louis replied: "To me." These words sounded the key-note of a new era. Henceforth Molière's success, like all else in France, was dependent on the monarch's will.

Before his death the crafty cardinal eased his conscience by presenting his ill gotten wealth to the King. Louis, not to be outdone, gave it a clear title by promptly returning it as a gift from himself, and was requited for this generosity by the following remarkable words: "Sire, I owe your Majesty everything; but I

believe I can pay you, in a great degree, by giving you Monsieur Colbert." This great man was then a subordinate of Nicolas Fouquet, superintendent of the finances, an official whose business methods are summed up in his unabashed reply when the King asked for pocket-money: "Sire, the exchequer is empty, but his Eminence, the Cardinal, will lend you what you want."

Upon Mazarin's death Fouquet became the man of the hour; yet, like many a financier of modern times, he rode for a fall. Gloomy Colbert, "who had never been taught anything, but knew everything," went nightly to the King's cabinet with proofs of his chief's pilfering. While his downfall was thus secretly plotted, the vainglorious superintendent, unconscious of impending danger, planned a marvellous fête in honour of his young monarch, — a fête which gave our poet the opportunity to enhance the royal favour already won; though, for the moment, its story must give place to an account of the play which retrieved the popularity *Don Garcia* had lost.

The comedy which accomplished this is called *The School for Husbands* (*L'École des maris*), — a piece so amusing in conception, strong in situation, and clever in characterisation that Voltaire credits it with having established Molière's reputation for ever; and further adds that, "had he written but this one play, he might have passed for an excellent author of comedy."[1] This is not hyperbolic praise. *The School for Husbands* fulfils all the demands of pure comedy; moreover, it is refined in tone, — an even rarer quality in its day.

Its story concerns a pair of brothers having the guardianship of two sisters whom they intend, respectively, to

[1] *Vie de Molière, avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.*

marry. Ariste, the elder, gives his ward, Léonor, full confidence and every liberty, much to the disgust of Sganarelle, the younger, who jealously keeps her sister, Isabelle, in strict seclusion.

"I find that one must win a woman's heart to govern her," says Ariste. "I have always consented to Léonor's young wishes. . . . Amusements, balls, and comedies are things I hold quite proper in forming youthful character; and since one must breathe its air, the world, according to my idea, is a better school than any pedant's book."

Ariste's theory of education has made little headway in France. Sganarelle's doctrine that a young girl should "close her ears to the flattery of coxcombs and never walk abroad unattended," conforms more nearly with the customs of that country; but Molière shows his own sympathy with Ariste's enlightened views by the ingenious way in which the apparently demure and docile Isabelle out-manœuvres suspicious Sganarelle and makes him the unwitting go-between for her lover, Valère, and herself. So cleverly does this typical *jeune fille* play her cards that her poor guardian is tricked and discomfited at every turn, only to learn that he has been the inadvertent means of aiding his ward to marry his young rival for her hand.

In this dénouement, which Voltaire calls "the best that Molière ever contrived," Ariste's theory of trust and freedom triumphs unconditionally. Indeed, *The School for Husbands* is throughout an argument in behalf of that character's philosophy that "locks and bars do not make the virtue of our wives or daughters." Montaigne held that "it would be more fitting to see the class rooms strewn with leaves and flowers than with the

blood-stained stumps of birch rods," and in *The School for Husbands* Molière, too, preaches this doctrine of kindness to the young. The world is just beginning to listen to the wisdom of these great Frenchmen.

Pure comedy, besides painting life sincerely and lightly, should tell the story of an individual's triumph over the complications of existence, in a way that bears no kinship with the sorrow of tragedy or the hilarity of farce. Verse, although not essential, adds dignity, and the more closely the three oft decried unities are observed, the better organised will the structure be; yet the charm of comedy depends, above all, upon the skill with which both character and situation are blended in an atmosphere of natural mirth. Judged by these standards, *The School for Husbands* is the first pure comedy from Molière's pen; and if the embodiment of noble thoughts and emotions in a musical flow of words be poetry, he rises, by means of Ariste's high-minded stanzas, to the dignity of a true poet.

Structurally it is admirable. The story of Isabelle's triumph over suspicious Sganarelle and her happy union with Valère is consistently told by cleverly probable situations; while Ariste's well requited love for Léonor forms the contrast necessary for the secondary plot. Heretofore the classical five acts of the ancients had been the common form for both tragedy and comedy; by using three only in his *School for Husbands*, Molière adopted a construction now recognised as the ideal form for the latter.

The characterisation of this comedy, too, deserves all praise. Two persons so well contrasted as liberal minded Ariste and his bigoted, middle class brother, Sganarelle, one seldom meets; while in Isabelle's attendant, Lisette,

Molière introduces the confidential servant, whose familiarity, cunning, and fidelity he finally apotheosised in the Toinette of *The Imaginary Invalid*, — the archetype of all such maids.

Since Terence, Boccaccio, and possibly Lope de Vega each contributed his share in the situations, entire originality cannot be claimed for this play; but Molière's plots and characters were derived either from his extended knowledge of classical, Italian, French, and even Spanish dramatic literature, his keen observation of the world, or the experiences of his own life. For instance, *The Blunderer* was the result of research, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, of observation. *The School for Husbands*, on the other hand, was a subjective play, wherein the author's own jealous nature found vent in Sganarelle, his ideals expressing themselves in Ariste's liberal philosophy. But of this more presently.

Looked at, therefore, from every point of view except that of originality, Voltaire's judgment is correct. Molière's public, too, was quick to recognise the charm of his new comedy; for although produced at the end of the dull month of June it attained such instantaneous success that within a fortnight gossip Loret gave it this doggerel tribute:

> *The School for Husbands*, you should know,
> Pleases all Paris as a show.
> This piece, so highly prized and new,
> Of Mr. Molier (*sic*) is the due.
> Such charm and fun does it disclose
> That off to Fontainebleau he goes,
> With actors skilled to entertain
> In plays both classic and profane;
> There, with its humour unforeseen,
> To bring delight to King and Queen.[1]

[1] *La Muse historique*, July seventeenth, 1661.

The words "King and Queen" refer to the success of *The School for Husbands* before the mighty.

While it was drawing crowds to the Palais Royal, Fouquet was entertaining lavishly at his fool's paradise of Vaux-le-Vicomte, not far from Fontainebleau. His guests included Monsieur and his bride, Henrietta of England, together with her mother, the dowager queen of that country; and as the King's brother had been married only three months, what more appropriate for the waning days of a honeymoon, thought the superintendent, than to summon Molière's comedians to present their skit upon husbands? They came, and the success of the new play at Vaux was so great that the King must needs see it at Fontainebleau.

This triumph, however, was only a prelude to the part Molière played at Fouquet's downfall. Versailles was then merely a square palace with a park of tangled undergrowth; St. Germain and Fontainebleau, mere hunting-boxes — put to shame by the mosaic floors, marbles, paintings, vases, bas-reliefs, parks, cascades, and fountains of Vaux-le-Vicomte. Le Vau had been the architect, Le Brun the decorator, and Le Nôtre the landscape-gardener of the superintendent's marvellous country-seat; his *maître d'hôtel* was the peerless Vatel. To show the handiwork of these four geniuses to the King was his ambitious dream; and as Colbert thought a royal visit would throw the superintendent off his guard, the entire court was ordered to make merry at Fouquet's expense.

If the park at Vaux-le-Vicomte was a hotbed of conspiracy, its shaded alleys, Italian gardens, bowers, walks, grottoes, terraces, and esplanades made it fairy-land as well. To amuse a young king and his pleasure

bent court between the amazing repasts devised by Vatel, there were games of skill and chance, musicians, dancing girls, and fireworks; and wherever a boscage gave shelter, baths, tennis-courts, swings, chapels, and billiard-rooms. In the midst of lovers' trysts stood dainty booths where fans, gloves, sweetmeats, pastilles, or perfumes were distributed to the guests; while, to cap the climax of this newly rich hospitality, the insatiate gambler found upon his dressing-table a well filled purse, placed there by his ostentatious host. But instead of the encomiums poor Fouquet looked for, came cruel rebuff.

When the King viewed this peculated splendour, he merely said, "I am shocked at such extravagance," while the courtiers, instead of being overawed, grew envious. Blazoned throughout the chateau were the Fouquet arms — a squirrel pursued by a snake up the branch of a tree — and beneath was the motto, "Quo non ascendam." The King, whose knowledge of Latin was limited, asked its meaning, and jealous favourites were quick to interpret it as "Whither wilt thou not rise," pointing at the same time to the serpent, which by a strange coincidence was a charge upon the arms of Colbert.

His Majesty was, indeed, in a mood to wonder whither the squirrel would not aspire to rise; for, while Colbert, the serpent, coiled nearer and nearer with poison in his fangs, Fouquet made a roué's bid — so the story goes — of two hundred thousand livres for the charms of slender, blue-eyed Louise de la Vallière. But this one true lady in all that wanton court loved the handsome young King with the fervour of a girl's first love, and told him of the insult in a flood of tears. The monarch was tempted to transgress the laws of hospitality then and there by arresting the rake who had robbed him and tried to

debauch his sweetheart; but the wiser counsel of his mother, Anne of Austria, prevailing, the superintendent was spared, until a fortnight later a time more opportune arrived to compass his downfall.[1]

In the midst of these plots and counterplots, with their setting of love and enchantment, Molière, engaged by Fouquet, gave a comedy in an open-air theatre, with interludes of music and dancing. The piece thus presented was *The Bores* (*Les Fâcheux*), a skit in verse upon court life written to order in a fortnight.

Nearly two years had elapsed since *Les Précieuses ridicules* had startled Paris; meantime Molière had gathered courage for another onslaught on the follies of society. The royal visit to Vaux gave him his opportunity; but instead of masking his batteries behind middle class ladies from the provinces, or servants disguised as gentlemen, he made a bold frontal attack upon the full strength of the court. To no man could the folly of a courtier be more apparent than to the King; so the poet aimed his satire at the flatterers and dandies swarming about the throne. If the King laughed, what mattered it if toadies and parasites should frown!

Molière's new play was to be the climax of the superintendent's fête. When the guests had gathered in a shaded alley, the author, without make-up or theatrical costume, appeared alone; and, apparently dumfounded by the presence of the King and so many courtiers, made a hasty apology for being without the actors necessary to give a play.[2] This was merely a ruse to whet curiosity,

[1] *Mémoires de Louis XIV*, édition de Charles Dreyss; *Siècle de Louis XIV*, by Voltaire; *The Life and Times of Louis XIV*, by G. P. R. James; *XVIIme siècle*, by Paul Lacroix.

[2] Molière's Preface.

for every detail had been looked to on that verdant stage. The scenery was flowers and giant trees; star shine, the limelight; and soon, to the strains of the royal violins, a nymph appeared in a shell upon the waters of a fountain, saying she came to that entrancing place from her grotto deep to see the greatest monarch the world had ever known.

In this flattering key she announced that the sole purpose of the hour was well to amuse the King; and to honour him she summoned wood-nymphs, fauns, and satyrs from the trees and thickets. They came, dancing their lissome steps to the music of hautboys, to the mournful plash of fountains, until from her vantage-shell she called:

> Bores, retire; or, if he see you in some measure,
> It must be solely for his pleasure![1]

The "he" referred to was, of course, the King; and this prologue was the signal for the play — if play it can be called. *The Bores* was more of a conceit than a comedy; a series of sketches from the author's note-book on society, presented with delightful ballet interludes. The plot can actually be put in a nut-shell. Éraste, the hero, has a rendezvous with his lady-love, Orphise, which, during three brief acts in sparkling Alexandrine verse, a dull lot of gentlemen bores prevent him from keeping. One by one they waylay him and insist that he shall listen to pet crotchets or settle silly quarrels. One has an air of his own composition to hum; another a new dance step to show; a third is a gamester with a story of misfortune to tell; two more have a sentimental dispute whether or

[1] The prologue in verse was written by Paul Pellisson, a poet in Fouquet's service.

not a lover ought to be jealous; and the distraught hero is compelled to listen to these bores, — no sooner rid of one than another appears with some new maggot in the brain. A scene of real action finally occurs when Damis, the guardian of Orphise, in seeking to avenge Éraste's clandestine attentions to his ward, is set upon in the dark, and his life spared by the hero whom he sought to destroy. Damis's anger turns to gratitude, and Éraste and Orphise are united, thus giving this delightful conceit some semblance to a play.

After the success of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Molière, according to tradition, was so dined and wined by courtiers who wished to see some rival travestied, that when he received Fouquet's order for a play he resolved to write a skit upon the very fops who had bored him with their pet ideas. If this be true, *The Bores* was certainly a neat revenge; for there was hardly a parasite at court who did not see his counterpart flaunting plumes and ribbons on Fouquet's woodland stage. In serving its purpose "well to amuse the King," it was a masterpiece of strategy too; for Louis was so overjoyed with this caricature of his courtiers that he congratulated the poet personally, and, maliciously pointing to the Marquis de Soyecourt, his *grand veneur*, or Master of the Stag Hounds, said, "There is an original fellow you left out." Molière took the hint, and ten days later when *The Bores* was repeated at Fontainebleau, the sportsman's part of Dorante had been added. His hunting jargon was learned, so the story goes, from De Soyecourt himself; for the author, knowing nothing of the chase, buttonholed the *grand veneur*, and made him chatter about his favourite sport until the needed details were procured.[1]

[1] *Ménagiana.*

From that hour in which Molière made him laugh at the follies of his own courtiers, Louis never failed in his protection. Henceforth, secure in the royal favour, our poet might defy his enemies; so *The Bores*, first of those plays he wrote to amuse his King, proved indeed a triumph. Although it must be classed as obsequious, its Gallic truth was so apparent that it won for him an even more notable partisan than Louis the Grand. La Fontaine, the fabulist, was a pensioner of Fouquet, and after the historic fête which compassed his patron's downfall he wrote a versified letter to a friend, acclaiming Molière greater than Terence, and crediting him with having revolutionised the dramatic art; for, as he concludes,

> Full altered is the former style,
> Chalked Jodelet 's no more worth while;
> And now it is no longer art,
> One step from nature to depart.[1]

Thus La Fontaine, after Molière the most original genius of that time, recognised his rival's worth and proved his own merit as a critic. That very quality of never departing one step from nature is the charm of Molière. Full altered, indeed, was the former style!

[1] *Lettre à Maucroix.*

IX

ARMANDE BÉJART

THE actress who recited the naiad's prologue to *The Bores* at Vaux-le-Vicomte was Madeleine Béjart, then forty-three years old; and the thought of Molière's faithful comrade trying to simulate a joyous nymph with her time-worn smile is rendered even more pathetic by the knowledge that a young rival was soon to play her rôle of heroine in the poet's life as well as in his comedies. This usurper was Armande Béjart, Madeleine's youngest sister, a girl of "twenty or thereabouts," whom Molière married on Shrove Monday, 1662.

La Béjart must have known the prologue she was speaking was concerned with another woman's happiness; but she had consolation in the thought that her sister's veering nature would be the undoing of her in the end. Standing alone on the shore, she heard the alluring song and saw the hidden reef, but dared not cry a warning to her lover. However, the story of Armande the siren must give temporary place to a consideration of Molière's worldly situation at the time of his marriage, and the reasons which led him to that act of folly.

In the early days of wandering, both Dufresne and Madeleine Béjart shared with him the business management of the troupe; but after his plays had won Parisian success, he became sole director, — a fact demonstrated by the allotment to him of an extra share of the receipts

as author, and the statement made by La Grange on the first page of his *Register* that, "This book belongs to the Sieur la Grange, one of the comedians of the troupe of the Sieur de Molière."

In 1661 his share as an actor was doubled in order that his intended bride might be provided for; so if his yearly income at the time of his marriage had not reached the enviable sum of thirty thousand livres,[1] with which he is later accredited — a sum equivalent to as many dollars — it was rapidly approaching it. He had scrimped too much during the days of ill fortune not to gratify his tastes when the coin of the public finally jingled in his pockets; and having an artist's temperament, he could no more avoid spending his money for good fellowship and beautiful things than he could avoid being born with emotional nerves. Yet he did not live beyond his means, and took good care to guard his interests against the rainy day which comes to nearly every public entertainer. Although he enjoyed luxury, and was reproached by his enemies for indulging in tapestries, pictures, and other objects of art,[2] generosity was his cardinal virtue. "He always gave to the poor with delight," says Grimarest, "while his charities were never of the ordinary sort."

Rich, generous, and protected by his King, Molière possessed, at the time of that memorable performance of *The Bores* at Vaux, all he had a right to hope for in this world, except domestic happiness. To long for relief from such a dearth in an otherwise well rounded life was in the nature of the man. Bohemian though he was, he prided himself upon his respectable birth, never

[1] *Vie de J.-B. P. Molière* by Louis Moland.

[2] *Le Boulanger de Chalussay: Élomire hypocondre.*

letting pass an opportunity to sign himself *valet de chambre du Roi;* while his plays show, time and again, that domestic happiness was his ideal, and cuckoldom his dread. This longing for a fireside was natural to one of his antecedents; this suspicion of the other sex, the inevitable result of living in an atmosphere of loose morality. But the society of frail women could not pervert his bourgeois nature entirely. Madeleine Béjart having lost her charm, and a theatrical life its novelty, Bohemia became his place of daily toil; home, the Promised Land.

From an undated letter in which Chapelle,[1] his old schoolmate, refers to a certain feminine trinity, many biographers have jumped to the conclusion that, before his marriage, he was a species of theatrical sultan. The trinity, of course, was Madeleine Béjart, Marquise Thérèse du Parc, and Catherine de Brie; and because Chapelle begs Molière not to show some verses to his women — *à ses femmes* are his words — a charge of polygamy is evolved which, in view of the loose morals of the time, it is impossible entirely to disprove. Nevertheless, as the French word *femme* means woman as well as wife, the three ladies in question, being rival actresses, may have been referred to merely in the sense of *femmes de théâtre.* Chapelle's letter and verses certainly present Molière and his trinity in a theatrical manner. After humorously ridiculing his friend's troubles and describing the intrigues of Minerva, Juno, and Venus, together with Jupiter's failure to reconcile these contentious goddesses, he concludes:

[1] Published in 1692 in Vol. V of the *Recueil des plus belles pièces des poètes françois, tant anciens que modernes, depuis Villon jusqu'à M. de Benserade.*

Such is the tale; do you not find
That any man of sober mind
Must, from its lesson, quickly see
'T is hard to make three dames agree?
Profit, my friend, good Homer follow;
Neutral be, and know 't is hollow
Ever a project to conceive,
A god so great could not achieve.

According to Arsène Houssaye,[1] "Juno was Madeleine Béjart, who wished no one to approach Molière; Minerva, the beautiful Du Parc on her marble pedestal, and Venus, blond, voluptuous De Brie, a mellow peach, a ray of light, a sweetheart unexpected." Still there is nothing in Chapelle's lines to indicate that this likening of Molière, a stage autocrat, to Jove, and his trinity of stars to quarrelsome goddesses, was anything more than an attempt to lampoon his friend's theatrical trials. The Mecca of every actress is the centre of the stage; cajolery, flattery, and even love-making are managerial wiles. As our poet, in his triple rôle of author, manager, and comedian, had only a single stage to satisfy the aspirations of three leading ladies, it is quite conceivable that his troubles differed greatly from those of a Padisha.

Whatsoever the truth of this may be, he knew that any young bourgeoise transplanted from her kitchen-garden to his theatrical hothouse would either wither or prove a hybrid; yet to inspire a child of Vagabondia with his longing for a hearthside seemed within the range of possibility. Believing his knowledge of the world would enable him to mould a wife according to his own ideals, he chose for his experiment a young girl

[1] *Les Comédiennes de Molière.*

whom he had known from childhood, and so confident was he of success that in *The School for Husbands*, produced but a few months before his marriage, he put into the mouth of Ariste this sermon on the duties of a guardian toward the ward he intends to marry:

> We must instruct the young good-naturedly,
> Their many faults correct with kind intent,
> And never frighten them with virtue's name.
> These maxims I have followed with Léonor:
> I have not called all petty freedom crime;
> Her youthful wishes I 've considered, too:
> The gods be praised, I 've not repented yet!
> With my consent, she has indulged in balls,
> Amusements, plays, and fine society:
> Things which appeal to me as suitable
> In broadening the youthful character;
> For, since we breathe its air, the world must be
> A better school than any pedant's book.
> What matters it if pretty ribbons, clothes,
> And linens fine she buys? My purpose is
> To gratify her whims; and these are still
> The pleasures all rich folk should give their daughters.
> Her father's testament would have us wed,
> But my design is not to tyrannise.
> I know our years are scarcely in accord,
> And therefore give her choice the fullest range.
> If forty thousand *écus* should succeed
> In making her o'erlook divergent years,
> She 'll marry me; if not, she 's free to choose . . .

Resolved upon marrying a girl barely twenty, Molière gave this doctrine to sensible Ariste, while acting the part of jealous Sganarelle. If the former represents the ideality, the latter is far nearer the reality of his nature. His betrothed hoodwinked him as completely as the Isabelle of his play duped her jealous guardian; for in

the apt words of a commentator, "Love's blindness made him believe that he, a serious, jealous, and passionate husband of forty, would be able to captivate and control a young wife."[1]

The youth of Armande Béjart is shrouded in obscurity. According to the anonymous author of *The Famous Comédienne*, "she passed the tender years of childhood in Languedoc with a lady of quality," and it has been hinted that this foster-mother lived at Nîmes. From facts so hazy, the truth can only be sketched. All the elder Béjarts were strolling players, and as Marie Hervé, their mother, travelled with them, Armande probably lived at a baby farm in Languedoc until old enough to join her family. Sharing her sister's passion for the stage, she became a member of the company at last, and seeing in the manager a means to her own advancement, used her wiles to win him. He meantime, watching her grow to womanhood, took pleasure in training her mind. At first her girlish graces and natural intelligence merely excited his interest; but as her charms matured this sentiment assumed the character of passion.

Though this story has, at least, the ring of truth, the parentage of the clever girl who thus beguiled Molière into matrimony is a mystery which may never reach solution; for the statement that she was "Madeleine Béjart's youngest sister," made on a previous page, was but a throw of the gauntlet to her traducers. M. Édouard Fournier says:

On a day of uncertain date, in a place no better known, since it is impossible to say whether it was Guyenne, Languedoc, or Provence, a girl was baptised with the

[1] *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Molière* by J. Taschereau.

name of Armande Grésinde Claire Élisabeth. She was born in the Béjart family. Who was her mother?[1]

Were it not for slander, the answer to M. Fournier's question would be Marie Hervé; for, in renouncing the inheritance of her husband's debts on the tenth of June, 1643, this woman named, in addition to her four elder children, "a little one not yet baptised"; furthermore, the marriage contract signed by Molière and Armande Béjart on January twenty-third and the marriage act entered in the parish register of the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, February twentieth, 1662, both state distinctly that the bride was the daughter of Marie Hervé and her husband, the defunct Joseph Béjart; so the logical supposition is that Armande was this unbaptised little one.[2]

Alas, calumny has done its utmost to controvert the truth of this, the most reasonable of all theories regarding Armande's parentage! For instance, our old friend, the anonymous author of *The Famous Comédienne*, insists that "Molière's wife was the child of Madeleine Béjart, a country actress, who was the pastime of a number of young men of Languedoc at the fortunate time of her daughter's birth," and further adds that "it would be difficult to tell exactly who her father was; for, although Molière married her, she was believed to be his daughter."

[1] *Le Roman de Molière.*

[2] The marriage act was discovered by L.-F. Beffara, and published in 1821 in his *Dissertation sur J.-B. Poquelin Molière.* The marriage contract was first published in 1863 by M. Eudore Soulié (*Recherches sur Molière*). To these two archæologists and M. A. Jal (*Documents sur Molière et sa famille,* 1867) is due the preservation in text of invaluable documents concerning Molière, many of the originals of which were destroyed by the Communists in 1871.

Even this vilifier admits that "the truth of this is not fully known," and his (or her) base insinuations would have gained no credence had not Racine in a letter to the Abbé le Vasseur stated that a jealous actor named Montfleury was so enraged by Molière's ridicule that he sought to undermine him at court. "Montfleury has drawn up a charge against Molière," are Racine's words, "and has presented it to the King. He accuses him of having married the daughter after having loved the mother," and adds, "but Montfleury is not listened to at court." Boileau, too, is quoted as having said that Molière's first love was Madeleine Béjart, "whose daughter he married,"[1] and Grimarest, writing from hearsay, maintains that Armande was the daughter of La Béjart, "who preferred being Molière's mistress to being his mother-in-law."

Boulanger de Chalussay repeats the calumny of *The Famous Comédienne* in words which will not bear translation; but an intendant of the King's brother, named Guichard, who attempted to discredit the testimony of Molière's widow in a suit at law by calling her "the daughter of her husband and wife of her father," was condemned to make honourable apology with bared head and bended knee; so it is evident that the charge of incest, at least, was incapable of proof; and this is the view of all Molière's biographers. The majority, however, accept the theory of Armande's illegitimacy. Even when Beffara unearthed the marriage act wherein she appears as Marie Hervé's daughter, M. A. Bazin[2] was equal to the occasion. Because "it was necessary to

[1] MS. Notes of Brossette in the *Bibliothèque nationale. Notice biographique sur Molière* by Paul Mesnard.

[2] *Notes historiques sur la vie de Molière.*

offer Molière's father and brother-in-law a daughter and sister for whom they need not blush too deeply," he argues that "the widow of Béjart, senior, consented to declare herself the mother, and her late husband the father, of the child born in 1645 (*sic*)."

To accuse a man able to brighten rather than tarnish his family name, together with all his wife's relatives, of forgery for the mere purpose of appeasing a father's pride, seems preposterous enough; but M. Édouard Fournier[1] plays even greater havoc with probability by imputing the supposed falsification to Madeleine's anxiety to hide the birth of her child from the Baron de Modène. If she could convince him of her fidelity, urges this writer, he would honour her with his hand in marriage.

Modène being married already, Madeleine could scarcely expect he would resort to uxoricide, or even bigamy, for her sake; and the contention of M. Jules Loiseleur[2] seems equally hazy. After admitting that Armande Béjart's age of "twenty or thereabouts," recorded in the marriage contract, coincides with that of the "little one not yet baptised," this writer considers the maternity of Marie Hervé — a woman supposedly fifty-three at the time of her husband's death — wholly preposterous.

Marie Hervé's death certificate does give her age as eighty; but the witnesses were her son-in-law and youngest son — of all her family the least likely to be familiar with the date of her birth, whereas the Abbé Dufour[3] cites good evidence to show that, on the tomb

[1] *Le Roman de Molière.*

[2] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière.*

[3] *Le Moliériste,* May, 1883.

Madeleine erected to her mother's memory, the following epitaph was inscribed:

> Here lies the body of Marie Hervé, widow of the honourable man, Joseph Béjart, deceased the ninth of January, 1670, aged seventy-five.[1]

It is highly improbable that Madeleine inscribed a lie upon her mother's tomb; so, instead of being fifty-three at the time of Armande's birth, Marie Hervé was barely forty-eight. Her fecundity, though unusual, was wholly within the range of possibility.

An explanation of the supposed falsification of court records more reasonable than any yet advanced is that Marie Hervé's assumption of parentage was for the purpose of deceiving Molière himself. That Madeleine should wish to hide her shame from a stage struck youth until she had succeeded in alienating him from his family, is certainly conceivable; and were this the case, to oppose her daughter's marriage with her former lover would have been her most natural course. According to Grimarest, this is precisely what happened:

> La Béjart suspected his intentions toward Armande, and often threatened violence to Molière, her daughter, and herself should he dare dream of this marriage. However, this passion of a mother, who tormented her continually and made her endure all the vexations she could invent, did not suit the young girl. Feeling she would rather try the pleasures of being a wife than support the displeasure of her mother, this young person decided one morning to burst into Molière's apartment,

[1] M. Gustave Larroumet, writing in the *Moliériste* of October, 1886, calls attention to an error of the Abbé Dufour, — Marie Hervé's age being given as *seventy-three*, not *seventy-five*, in this epitaph.

firmly resolved not to leave until he had recognised her as his wife. This he was forced to do; but the outcome caused a terrible hubbub: the mother showed as much sign of rage and despair as if Molière had married her rival, or her daughter had fallen into the hands of a blackguard.

If the poet was kept in ignorance of his wife's true parentage, Madeleine's attitude, here described, becomes most reasonable; but there is danger that this new theory may arouse still another hornet's nest. Indeed, opposed to Grimarest's testimony is that of the author of *The Famous Comédienne*, who assures us that —

Madeleine prepared and concluded the marriage by a series of patient and tortuous intrigues, her object being to recover, through Armande, the influence over Molière of which Mlle. de Brie had deprived her.

An elaborate chain of documentary evidence, covering a period longer than thirty years, points to Armande Béjart's legitimacy. Besides the marriage contract and the marriage act already mentioned, a power of attorney given by the heirs of Marie Hervé to Madeleine Béjart; Madeleine's will; a power of attorney from Molière to his wife; the marriage contract between Geneviève Béjart and J. B. Aubry; the plea of Armande to the archbishop of Paris for permission to inter Molière; an income settlement by the heirs of Madeleine Béjart; a contract between Molière's widow and the wardens of the church of St. Paul; the letters ratifying this contract; and the marriage contract between J. F. Guérin and Armande Béjart herself, — all present Molière's wife most unequivocally as being Marie Hervé's daughter.

Madeleine's will is a document containing particularly

strong testimony in favour of Armande's legitimacy; for La Béjart was of sound mind when she drew her last testament (January ninth, 1672), and it is difficult to believe that, had Armande been her daughter, she would have sworn to a lie upon her death-bed. Moreover, the codicil to this will, drawn but three days before Madeleine's death, is further evidence that, were Armande her daughter, she was facing death with this lie upon her lips.

Such evidence would certainly be sufficient to close the case, did not the testimony of Montfleury and Boileau remain in rebuttal. But the defender of Molière's character has a seventeenth-century witness, too, — the King, — to whom the infamous charge was made. Undoubtedly there was much verisimilitude in Montfleury's contention. After thirteen years of absence Madeleine, known to have borne one illegitimate child, returned to Paris accompanied by Armande Béjart, corresponding very nearly in age with her daughter, Françoise, baptised in 1638; and, by drawing the conclusion that the two were the same, Molière might, with much semblance to truth, be accused of "having married the daughter after having loved the mother." First, to convince his monarch of the falsity of this charge, then to remain silent in the face of slander, would have been his most dignified course; and the King's conduct is evidence that such was the case. Louis became the godfather of Molière's first child.[1] In no other way could

[1] Louis, Molière's eldest son, born January nineteenth, baptised February twenty-eighth, died November tenth, 1664. Molière had two other children, Esprit Madeleine (who alone survived him), baptised August fourth, 1665, and Pierre Jean Baptiste, born September fifteenth, baptised October first, died October tenth, 1672.

he more effectually give the lie to all the slanders of Montfleury.

La Grange records that "the wedding [*mariage*] of M. de Molière took place after a performance at Monsieur d'Equeuilly's," or, in other words, at night,—a time when the churches were deserted. As but one ban, instead of the habitual three, was published, it is argued that in order to hide the base origin of the bride the ceremony was clandestine. La Grange's entry, however, was made on Tuesday, February fourteenth, while previously he says that "M. de Moliere married Armande Claire Elisabeth Gresinde Bejard (*sic*) on Shrove Tuesday, 1662." Shrove Tuesday fell upon February twenty-first, and the parish register of the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois gives Monday, February twentieth, as the date of the religious ceremony, which M. Jal, a most careful archæologist, maintains took place in the morning. The suppression of the bans being purely a question of a fee, with that fact the argument of secrecy vanishes.

As only kinsfolk witnessed the marriage contract, the wedding itself was, in all probability, a family affair; and if the word *mariage* in La Grange's *Register* was used in the sense of *noce*, the entertainment after the performance at Monsieur d'Equeuilly's was probably some prenuptial affair in honour of the groom's theatrical comrades. So far as La Grange is concerned, this was the "wedding of M. de Molière"; consequently his confusion of Monday with Tuesday in recording a ceremony he did not attend becomes a trivial error.

A cash dowry of ten thousand livres, given Armande by Marie Hervé, is still another bone of contention. Where, it is argued, could a widow who inherited nothing

but debts have obtained such a sum, especially as Geneviève Béjart received but four thousand livres, mostly in chattels, at the time of her marriage; and since Madeleine favoured Molière's daughter in her will, she must have given the dowry, too, and was therefore Armande's mother. It is equally apparent that Molière might have used Marie Hervé as a means of presenting his wife with an independent fortune; so the affair of the dowry might be dismissed entirely, were it not for the baptismal certificate of Molière's second child. This infant was christened Esprit-Magdeleyne (*sic*) — a union of La Béjart's name with that of her first protector, the Baron Esprit Rémond de Modène; and, moreover, that very nobleman stood sponsor with Madeleine at the ceremony.

If this pair of *ci-devant* lovers were the child's grandparents, this joint sponsorship becomes comprehensible; indeed, it is difficult to find any other explanation. Of all the evidence cited by Armande's traducers, this is certainly the most damning, yet it is purely circumstantial, be it remembered. It is still possible to believe that Madeleine and Modène, having reached the age when passion's fires were only smouldering embers, thus officiated together in order to keep alive the memory of their own dead child. "On revient toujours à ses premiers amours," is the French proverb. Shall it not be applied in this instance?

Perhaps, as M. Loiseleur says, "A veil no hand will ever raise hides the origin of the young woman whom Molière married on the twentieth of February, 1662";[1] but no amount of surmise or slander can completely break that chain of documentary evidence

[1] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière.*

beginning with Marie Hervé's renunciation of her husband's inheritance in the name of the "little one not yet baptised," and ending with Armande Béjart's second marriage contract. If Armande was not Marie Hervé's daughter, then Molière, his wife, and all her family must be classed together as forgers; and he, the greatest literary genius in France, the friend of the King, be accused either of the most abject of crimes, or of an utter disregard of common decency. His philosophy was certainly too pure, his ideals too exalted, for him to have been the vile man his enemies and unwitting friends portray.

A more agreeable mystery concerns the identity of the young person to whom Chapelle, in the undated letter already quoted,[1] referred to in an injunction regarding some sentimental verses which accompanied his Olympian satire. "You will show these beautiful verses only to *Mlle. Menou*," he says to Molière, "for they are the description of you and her."

Chapelle, of course, may have made mention of some unknown enchantress; still it is more reasonable to presume that *Menou* was the stage name of Armande Béjart before she was known as Mlle. de Molière. At a time (1653) when Molière's wife was only ten, the part of Ephyra in Corneille's *Andromeda* was allotted to a Mlle. Menou;[2] yet a nereid with four lines to speak might readily have been played by a child. Although M. Baluffe[3] unearths a distant connexion of Chapelle's named Mathieu de Menou who possibly had a daughter, it is far more likely that Chapelle's injunction referred to Armande Béjart. His letter was probably written (1659) at a moment when Molière's love for his

[1] See page 137. [2] See page 47. [3] *Molière inconnu.*

ward was turning his thoughts toward matrimony; so an affair with another young person was an unlikely occurrence, and there is no record of any actress of the name *Menou* having appeared in Paris; so the Ephyra of *Andromeda* as well as the lady of the verses was, in all probability, Armande Béjart.

The date of this lady's Parisian début is another unsolved mystery. La Grange, silent regarding her advent, mentions her as a member of the company in June, 1662; but the first rôle she is known with certainty to have filled is that of Élise in *The Criticism of The School for Wives* (*La Critique de l'École des femmes*).

About her character and appearance no such doubt exists. A verbal portrait, attributed to Mlle. Poisson,[1] says that "she had a mediocre figure; but her manner was engaging, although her eyes were small, and her mouth large and flat. She did everything well, however, even to the smallest things, although she dressed most extraordinarily, in a manner always opposed to the fashion of the times." "She was full of charm and talent," says M. Génin,[2] "and sang French and Italian delightfully. Being an excellent actress who knew how to take the stage even when only playing the listener, she was an incorrigible flirt as well, and the despair of Molière, who loved her distractedly to his dying day." Her bitter enemy, the author of *The Famous Comédienne*, while denying her beautiful features, is forced to admit that "her appearance and manners rendered her extremely amiable in the opinion of many people," and that she was "very affecting when she wished to please."

[1] *Lettre sur la vie et les ouvrages de Molière.* See note, page 81.

[2] *Lexique comparé de la langue de Moliere et des écrivains du XVII^e siècle.*

"No one," according to the Brothers Parfaict,[1] "knew better than she how to heighten the beauty of her face by the arrangement of her hair, or of her figure by the cut of her costume"; while a writer in the *Mercure galant* (1673) bears out Mlle. Poisson's testimony regarding the eccentricity of her dress by ascribing to Armande Béjart a radical reform in the fashion of the day, whereby the waist line, heretofore concealed, "was made to appear more beautiful."

Perhaps the best description of his wife's charms and his own feelings regarding her is given by Molière himself. In a scene of *The Burgher, a Gentleman*, Cléonte, a lover, and Covielle, his valet, discuss Lucile, the character played by Armande Béjart in the following manner:

COVIELLE

You might find a hundred girls more worthy of you. In the first place, she has small eyes.

CLÉONTE

True, she has small eyes, but they are full of fire and the most brilliant, the most piercing, the most sympathetic eyes it is possible to find.

COVIELLE

She has a large mouth.

CLÉONTE

Yes, but one finds there charms one does not find in other mouths. The very sight of that mouth is enough to create desire: it is the loveliest, the most lovable mouth in the world.

COVIELLE

As for her figure, she is not tall.

[1] *Histoire du théâtre français.*

CLÉONTE

No, but she is graceful and well made.

COVIELLE

She affects indifference in speech and manner.

CLÉONTE

Quite true; but it is all delightful, and I can't describe the charming way in which she ingratiates herself into people's hearts.

COVIELLE

As for her wit —

CLÉONTE

Ah! that she has, Covielle — the keenest and the most delicate.

COVIELLE

Her conversation —

CLÉONTE

Her conversation is charming.

COVIELLE

It is always serious.

CLÉONTE

Do you want bubbling mirth and unrestrained hilarity? Is there anything more tiresome than women who laugh at everything?

COVIELLE

Well, at least, she is the most capricious person in the world.

CLÉONTE

Yes, she is capricious, I quite agree; but everything becomes beautiful women. One suffers everything from beautiful women.

None knew better than Molière the meaning of those words, "One suffers everything from beautiful women."

It was the key-note of his married life. No man has written his heart more truly than he: sometimes in a lamentation like the above; sometimes in a prophecy, as when, in *Don Garcia of Navarre*, he wrote:

> No marriage could join us; I hate too well
> Bonds that for both must prove a living hell.

Molière's marriage was, if not a hell, certainly a purgatory; yet how could a union between a man of forty with emotional nerves, and a young, frivolous girl who lived for admiration and flattery, prove different?

The summer following the wedding was passed at St. Germain. Doubtless before the honeymoon had waned, Armande began to show her leopard spots. Having taken the centre of the stage from her three rivals, to waste her charms upon so humdrum a thing as a husband was not in her nature; and being in the region of fine gentlemen, there were means at hand to practise the arts so aptly described by M. Fournier:

By means of her airs and graces, her nonchalance, and her bewitching glances, Armande took in only too many people and listened to too many of the exalted rakes who haunt court antechambers in the morning and theatres in the evening, merely to boast of their conquests to the entire town. Our poet soon learned that the lot of Sganarelle was to be his own, and that the dying Scarron had predicted truly, in 1660, when he bequeathed, in his burlesque will: "To Molière, cuckoldom."[1]

The reader may think he got his deserts; but love is not a thing to be calendared, nor are great natures likely to prove the most discerning. Though open to the

[1] *Le Roman de Molière.*

charge of fickleness, Molière need only be compared with Shakespeare, Byron, or Shelley, to be acquitted of any crime more serious than that of being a genius; for no man is able to think the thoughts of all mankind until his hand has touched all human chords. He loved without the church's benediction in his youth, and with a hapless marriage paid the penalty. Blame him, if you like; yet when the young blood sings in a pretty woman's veins, even a stronger man than a genius will listen.

A word of justice, too, for Madeleine Béjart, that nymph of forty-three, who spoke the prologue to her heartless sister's happiness. Four years Molière's senior, her love for him was almost maternal; and throughout her life she bore upon her shoulders those material cares so irksome to a man of genius. He would doubtless have written his masterpieces without her inspiration and help; but, as M. Loiseleur truly says, "He would not have written them so soon, nor so rapidly, nor would they have sparkled so delightfully with wit, spirit, and liberality."

X

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES AND ITS COROLLARIES

Scaramouche was now tenant instead of landlord, and the troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne rapidly losing prestige; for in May, 1662, Molière's players were commanded by the King to St. Germain-en-Laye, while their rivals were left without the royal pale.

The court was dangerous ground for a bride of Armande Béjart's temperament; but her husband had proclaimed that "locks and bars do not make the virtue of our wives or daughters," so in taking her to this region of "balls, amusements, plays, and fine society," he merely practised his own doctrines. Though the world might be "a better school than any pedant's book" for the Léonor of his *School for Husbands*, he was soon to learn that for a young woman as vain as his wife it was merely a playground.

The sojourn at St. Germain was well requited from the privy purse, but the famous tournament in honour of the dauphin's birth which gave the court between the Louvre and Tuileries the name of "Place du Carrousel" proved a dangerous competitor. The pavilions, costumes, booths, and tilt-yards for this pageant cost the King a million or more; but so valiantly did his courtiers cut the Turk's head — it might have been some fire-spitting dragon — that he got his regal money's

worth; the more so when he caracoled before the noblest Romans of his court in a glittering international quadrille, wherein Monsieur led Persian warriors; the great Condé, fierce turbaned Turks; the Duc d' Enghien, a band of rajahs, and De Guise, a tribe of whooping savages.

No comedy could vie with such a spectacle, so Molière closed his theatre on the tournament days (June 5–6); but Louis soon made amends by again summoning him to St. Germain, where he remained six weeks and received a honorarium of fourteen thousand livres. This caused La Grange to remark that "the King believed there were but fourteen parts, while the troupe was of fifteen"; but two actors from the Théâtre du Marais had lately joined the company, so his Majesty's mistake seems pardonable.

The new-comers were La Thorillière and De Brécourt, comedians with the common characteristic of being mediocre play-wrights, but of very different parts; since the former, though at one time a captain of infantry, was a genial, peaceable fellow, while the latter was a veritable *bretteur* who once fled the country for killing a cabman, — a crime the reader familiar with the Parisian genus will be likely to condone.[1]

[1] *Cleopatra*, a tragedy by La Thorillière, was played by Molière's troupe, December second, 1667; De Brécourt's comedy, *The Great Booby of a Son as Foolish as his Father* (*Le grand benêt de fils aussi sot que son père*), is attributed by the Brothers Parfaict, in their *Histoire du théâtre français*, to Molière himself, and consequently has been often cited among the lost one-act *canevas* of his barn-storming days. On January seventeenth, 1664, however (a fact unknown to the Brothers Parfaict), La Grange chronicles the first performance of this play as a "new piece of M. de Brécourt," and on February first, third, and fifth of that same year, states that it was the only comedy presented at

After the six weeks spent at St. Germain, La Grange records that "the queen-mother summoned the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who had begged her to procure them the favour of serving the King — the troupe of Molière having made them most envious." However, as these rivals had a royal subvention of twelve thousand livres and his own players but an unpaid pension, Molière could not permit even court grass to grow under his feet; so before his honeymoon had waned a new play was put upon the stocks. His own marriage being still paramount in his mind, he again chose the theme of a jealous guardian's love for a girl of "twenty or thereabouts," but his new school was, in name at least, for wives instead of husbands.

The School for Husbands contained two brothers of diverging views bent upon marrying wards of differing character; in *The School for Wives* (*L'École des femmes*), its companion piece, benign Ariste and high-minded Léonor are eliminated. Sganarelle, too, becomes a pedantic moralist named Arnolphe; but so similar is this character in disposition to his predecessor that one wonders at the change of name. Sganarelle's theory of preserving marital honour by keeping a wife behind closed doors gives place, however, to the belief that ignorance is a woman's safeguard, — a doctrine which forms the motive of the play.

The opening scene strikes the key-note, for at the very outset Arnolphe, "a railer o'er the cuckold's horns of others," announces that he will prevent their appear-

the Palais Royal; so it could not have been a one-act piece, nor could it have been written by Molière. Another piece by De Brécourt, *The Shade of Molière* (*L'Ombre de Molière*, 1674), has been several times printed as an after-piece to the poet's works.

ance on his own head by wedding a fool. When the soundness of this principle is doubted by his sceptical friend, Chrysalde, he defends it warmly in the following tirade against clever women:

I wed a fool lest I become a fool:
Your better half is wise, I hold as any
Christian; and yet the cleverest wives are signs
Of evil, and I know the price that some
Must pay for choosing those who 're far too bright.
What! charge myself with some o'er brilliant jade
Who 'll talk unceasingly of routs and clubs,
Or write soft sentiments in prose and verse
For swarming wits and dandies to admire!
And have me known, forsooth, as madam's mate, —
A saint benighted none will reverence?
No, no! I wish no goodly wit in mine:
A wife who writes knows more than woman should,
And mine, I hold, shall know not what it is
To rhyme; and if at *corbillon* she plays,
I wish her to reply, "Just one cream tart,"
When in her turn she 's asked just what it is
She 'll offer to the basket.[1] Well, in brief,
I wish her to be ignorant; and hold
It is enough that she should tell the truth,
And loving me, sew, spin, and say her prayers.

For his experiment Arnolphe has chosen Agnès, a girl he loved at the age of four "above all other children" because of her "sweet, sedate manner." Believing her to be the daughter of a peasant woman "glad to be rid of her," he has educated her to be his wife in a manner best explained in his own words:

[1] *Corbillon*, meaning literally "a little basket," was a fashionable game of the period, similar to crambo, wherein a player was obliged to reply, by a word rhyming in *on* to the question *Que met-on dans mon corbillon?*

From turmoil far, within a convent's quiet,
They reared her closely, following my views —
One way of saying that each rule laid down
Was meant to make an idiot of her.
Wherefore, may God be praised ! success has crowned
My work ; and now, full-grown, she has become
So innocent, I bless the saints who showed
Me how to mould a wife unto my taste.

Upon the completion of this education in nescience, Agnès is confided to the care of two venal servants, who, in spite of assurances that the "sparrow shall not go out for fear of the cat," permit a fair-haired gallant to bribe his way into the cage. When the play begins, Arnolphe is unaware of this intrigue; and in order to conceal the identity of his pompous hero from the disturber of his happiness, Molière employs a dramatic expedient unworthy his craftsmanship, introduced in the shape of an inordinately snobbish desire on Arnolphe's part to be called Monsieur de la Souche (literally Mr. Blockhead), —an affectation made light of by Chrysalde in the retort that he "once knew a peasant who dug a muddy ditch around his quarter acre and thereafter called himself Monsieur de l'Isle." [1]

Having thus set forth his matrimonial doctrines and distaste for his patronymic in the opening scene, Arnolphe immediately reassures himself of the dutifulness and safety of his beloved Agnès, and soon thereafter meets his rival face to face. Discovering that this young

[1] This incident has given rise to considerable controversy whether Chrysalde's retort was not intended to ridicule the name, Corneille de l'Isle, by which Thomas Corneille, the mediocre brother of the great poet, was then known. A contemporary writer, the Abbé d'Aubignac (1663), first called attention to this apparent satire of a rival.

spark, Horace by name, is the son of his bosom friend Oronte, he lends him a hundred pistoles to abet a love affair; whereupon the grateful youth, unaware, of course, that Monsieur de la Souche, the "rich old fool" who keeps his adored one in total ignorance of the world, is the man to whom he is speaking, tells him her name, with an effect upon Arnolphe's wrath easy to conceive. Careful not to betray himself to Horace, outraged Arnolphe upbraids innocent Agnès for her treachery, but receives a confession so ingenuous and frank that, more alarmed for her safety than mollified by her explanation, he resolves to marry her forthwith. Hastening to arrange the wedding, he again meets Horace, who informs him that Agnès has closed her door in his face and thrown a stone at him; but the joy of this news is quickly abated by the discovery that around it was wrapped a *billet doux*. Plunged once more into fury and despair, Arnolphe plots revenge, rushes to the girl they love in common, only to interrupt a rendezvous — his rival eluding him by jumping from a balcony.

In the resulting confusion Agnès escapes to her lover's arms; but with an obtuseness worthy of Lélie the blunderer, he confides her to Arnolphe's care, thereby making possible the climax, wherein the latter upbraids his false affianced bride, then pleads in vain for her love.

Arnolphe has been heretofore a pedantic taskmaster, yet when he confronts the truly feminine "little serpent he has warmed in his bosom," and learns that despite his teachings she has discovered that "love is full of joy," he becomes a man of impulse, sentiment, and passion; witness the following lines:

ARNOLPHE

Why don't you love me, Madam Impudence ?

AGNÈS

Good heavens, I am not the one to blame :
Why did n't you, as he did, make me love ?
For surely, I have never hindered you.

ARNOLPHE

I 've tried by every means within my power;
But all my efforts are in vain — all lost !

AGNÈS

Indeed, he knows more of that art than you,
Since teaching me to love required no pains.

But the girl relents sufficiently to exclaim that from the bottom of her heart she wishes to please him, and asks what it would cost her to succeed. Arnolphe's answer is worthy a less pragmatic lover; indeed, it turns the interest to him, and strikes so strong a note of sympathy that this comedy is raised at once to a higher level than any Molière had yet reached :

Pray leave this fellow with the love he brings
And all the spell some mystic charm exerts ;
For happier with me a hundred times
You 'll be. Your wish is to be wise, arrayed
Full richly ? Both are yours, I swear ! By night,
By day, I 'll worship you, and close within
My arms enfold and kiss you, with my love
Devour you — every whim of yours shall be
My law — I can't explain, for all is said.
(*Aside*) Such passion leads to what extremities !
(*To Agnès*) No love approaches mine. Demand what proof
You will, ungrateful girl ! Can streaming cheeks,

Or bruisèd back, or half my locks out-torn,
Or death itself bring satisfaction? Speak,
Most cruel one; I 'm ready all to dare
And all to do, that I may prove my love!

Yet, woman-like, Agnès prefers her blond lover, so this appeal falls on deaf ears. Arnolphe is dismissed with the admonition that "two of Horace's words are worth all his own dissertations," and but for the timely arrival of a pair of fathers — the long lost parents of Agnès and Horace, respectively — his just anger might have consigned the cruel minx to "the inmost cell of a convent."

The assertion of these progenitors that their offspring have been betrothed since infancy brings the play to a happy conclusion for all save the disconsolate hero; but even to accomplish this cheerful result, Molière seems hardly justified in burdening his work with these time-hallowed fathers of classic comedy, — a fault which causes Voltaire to exclaim that "in *The School for Wives* the dénouement is quite as artificial as it was skilful in *The School for Husbands!*" [1]

In conception this play is even less original; for the story of a lover who makes a confidant of his rival, besides occurring in *The Jocular Nights* (*Piacevoli notte*), by Straparola, has been traced through preceding Italian and classical authors, even to Herodotus; while a novel by Scarron — itself filched from a Spanish source — called *The Useless Precaution* (*La Précaution inutile*), contains a character resolved not to wed unless he can find "a wife enough of an idiot to prevent fear of the evil tricks which clever women play their husbands." Still

[1] *Vie de Molière, avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.*

to fertilise a sterile subject until consummate flowers spring forth is a triumph of genius.

Though its subject may not be original, for all that it is inferior technically to *The School for Husbands*, the verses of this sprightly comedy certainly "do not give advantage to stubborn critics." In fact, Voltaire assures us that "connoisseurs admired the dexterity with which Molière was able to interest and please throughout five acts, solely by Horace's confidence in an old man, told in simple speeches." He might have added that this dexterity lay in making simple speeches present exalted sentiments in a musical flow of words; for never before had Molière shown such depth of feeling. Indeed, in the human scene between Arnolphe and Agnès, *The School for Wives* passes far beyond the foot-hills, almost to the noble heights, of tragedy.

It is masterful also in characterisation; for although Ariste, the altruist, is lacking, Chrysalde, the man of the world, is an equally true and far more practical philosopher; while both Arnolphe and Agnès, drawn with a firmer hand than Sganarelle and Isabelle, are conceived in closer accordance with present day ideas. Few modern lovers would uphold Sganarelle's doctrine of locks and keys, but Arnolphe's dream of innocence is shared by many. As M. Louis Moland aptly says, "the germ of him is in every old bachelor." [1]

Like its companion piece, it deals with the problem of an elderly man's love for a young girl, the problem of its author's own life. *The School for Husbands* was produced, be it remembered, nine months before Molière's marriage, whereas *The School for Wives* was presented ten months thereafter, — a divergence in time sufficient to

[1] *Vie de J.-B. P. Molière.*

justify the conclusion that Ariste's optimism expresses a bridegroom's hopes, Chrysalde's cynicism a husband's experience. For instance, when Arnolphe, fearful of wearing horns, ridicules his friend's theory that "when you don't get the wife you want, like a gambler, you should mend your luck by good management," that imperturbable philosopher replies:

> You scoff, my friend, but candidly I know
> A hundred ills in this world of mishap
> Greater than the dire accident you dread.
> Do you not think, that were I free to choose,
> I 'd rather be the thing you fear than married
> To an upright wife, whose temper makes a storm
> Grow out of nothing? one of those pure fiends,
> Those virtue-dragons fortified around
> By spotless deeds, who, owing to the wrong
> They have not done to us, unto themselves
> Would arrogate the right to domineer;
> Who, since they 're faithful, ask we shall forgive
> Most meekly every pitiful defect
> And all endure? One parting shot, good friend:
> The plight of cuckoldom is what we make
> It be; in some ways much to be desired:
> Like all else in this world, it has its joys.

The husband of a coquette might find considerable solace in this stoical reasoning. Indeed, throughout the play there is such an undertone of dread for the catastrophe Chrysalde thus makes light of, that one is tempted to read between the lines the story of the author's own fears. Usually this takes the form of cynicism; but sometimes it becomes broad humour, as when Alain, the servant, exclaims:

> In truth, a woman is a husband's pottage,
> And when a husband sees that other men

Would like to dip their fingers in his soup,
Immediately his anger waxes hot.

Since the optimistic *School for Husbands* was penned, Molière had certainly experienced a change of sentiment; for the utopian theories of amiable Ariste give place to raillery as sceptical as this:

I know the artful tricks, the subtle plots,
Which women use to leave us in the lurch;
And how they dupe us by their cleverness.

To interpret this passage as the plaint of a man to whom marital experience has taught the ways of women is not difficult; while the following lines from one of Arnolphe's all too frequent soliloquies might equally be said to express Molière's feeling whenever courtiers made unhallowed love to his young wife during that honeymoon at St. Germain. Certainly the period of thirteen years coincides with the time the poet wandered through the South of France and Armande Béjart was his ward:

What! supervise her training with such care,
Moreover cherish her within my house
For thirteen years, while every day my heart
Beats faster to her growing girlish charm,
And meantime she is pampered as my own,
In order, now, that in this very hour
When we are fully half as good as wed,
A coxcomb whom she fascinates shall pluck
Her slyly from beneath my bearded lip?
No, by the heavens, no! . . .

But the depth of Molière's passion for his vain, unfeeling wife can best be traced in the scene between Agnès and Arnolphe, when, thus unconsciously, his own heart is laid bare:

ARNOLPHE

(*Aside*) That word disarms my wrath; that look recalls
Unto my heart sufficient tenderness
To blot out all the blackness of her guilt.
How strange is love! To think that sober men
Should stoop to folly for such renegades
When all the world must see their faults. 'T is base
Extravagance, indeed, and rashness wild,
For wicked are their brains and weak their hearts,
And nothing stupider could be, or more
Disloyal, naught more frail; yet, in despite,
The world moves solely for these little brutes!
(*To Agnès*) Peace be it then, and pardon take for all!
Go, traitress, go; I give thee back affection:
Thus by the love I bear thee, learn my love,
And seeing me kind, love me in revenge.

There is danger, of course, that, in this quest for introspective passages, caution may be outweighed by zeal; still, so vain a bride as Armande Béjart could not long restrain her coquetry in the atmosphere in which her honeymoon was passed, nor could her doting husband long remain blind to the ways of libertine admirers; so the conclusion that the many touching strophes of this comedy set forth the trials and sorrows of the poet's heart seems amply justified. Indeed, nowhere, save in *The Misanthrope*, did he so clearly sing the misery of his soul; and it is perhaps this very subjectivity which makes *The School for Wives* the greatest of his Gallic plays.

Although national in spirit, this comedy was in a way a militant play; yet now that the tornado of abuse which burst upon Molière after its first performance has long subsided, it is difficult to realise how even the pharisees of that day could have found in its sprightly

mirth sufficient heresy to declare him the enemy of both common decency and Holy Church; yet such was the case.

Chrysalde's defence of wifely indiscretion was denounced as an attack upon marital ethics; a scene wherein Arnolphe instructs the innocent heroine in wifely duties and threatens her with "boiling caldrons" should she fail in circumspection, was held to be a travesty upon pulpit homilies. Furthermore, the eleven *Maxims of Marriage; or, Duties of a Married Woman, together with her Daily Practice*, compiled by Arnolphe for the instruction of his bride elect and read aloud by her, were anathematised as a base parody of the catechism. Two of these harmless precepts, freely translated, should establish the creed-bound acrimony of Molière's enemies:

MAXIM III

Far from duty is sly glancing,
Likewise rouges and pomade.
Learn the thousand drugs entrancing,
By which blushing tints are made,
Mortal poisons are to honour,
Since the powder, paint, and scent
Every false wife puts upon her
Seldom for her liege are meant.

MAXIM IV

She 's honour bound, 'neath coif sedate,
To stifle glances soft and low,
Since sworn to please her lawful mate
'T is wrong for her to please a beau.

Among the most scandalised religionists was the Prince de Conti, the erstwhile rake whose sanctimonious zeal condemned his former schoolmate's comedy "as a

licentious work offending good manners";[1] still, this skirmish with bigotry was only preliminary to the five years' war Molière soon waged against both Jansenists and Jesuits in behalf of his masterpiece, *The Hypocrite.*

Impiety proved so strong a drawing card that *The School for Wives* became the greatest stage success of its author's career. Between its production in Christmas week, 1662, and the Easter holidays, it was presented at the Palais Royal thirty-one times, — a run made even more phenomenal by the fact that the receipts exceeded a thousand livres at each of fourteen of these performances, whereas during the entire four years Molière had been in Paris that mark had been reached only twelve times, all told.

De Vizé's statement that "all the world found *The School for Wives* wicked, and all the world ran to see it,"[2] shows the part sensation played in this triumph; for what result other than success could be attained by a play that "the ladies condemned, but went to see"? "For my part," this writer adds, "I hold it the most mischievous subject that ever has existed, and I am ready to maintain that there is not a scene without an infinite number of faults"; yet he was obliged to avow, "in justice to the author," that "the piece was a monster with beautiful parts," and, in tribute to the histrionism of the company, to admit that "no comedy was ever so well played, or with such art," for each actor knew just how many steps to take, each glance was numbered. Loret, too, accounts Molière's comedy —

[1] *Traité de la comédie et des spectacles, selon la tradition de l'Église tirée des conciles et des saints Pères,* by Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, 1661.

[2] *Nouvelles nouvelles.*

A play at which such blame is hurled,
Although 't is seen of all the world,
That never topic of such worth
So much attention has brought forth.[1]

Moreover, *The School for Wives* made at least one ardent friend, for within a week after its presentation Boileau, then a young man of twenty-six, addressed the author a few complimentary stanzas upon "his most beautiful work," concluding with this cheering advice:

Let all your envious critics growl,
Though far and wide they idly howl
That you have charmed the mob in vain,
That your best verses do not please —
If you did not such plaudits gain,
You could not anger with such ease.[2]

Thus Boileau's friendship, like La Fontaine's, was inspired in the first instance by a just estimate of Molière's genius.

The School for Wives was first played before royalty on January sixth, 1663, and, according to Loret, "made their Majesties laugh until they fairly held their sides"; indeed so great was the royal mirth that Louis must needs see it again within a fortnight. Emboldened by his monarch's approval of a work the critics had so unreservedly condemned, Molière, with a view to answering them in kind, placed upon his boards, June first, 1663, *The Criticism of The School for Wives* (*La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes*), — a dialogue rather than a play.

The plot of this charming conceit consists solely in

[1] *La Muse historique.*

[2] *Stances à M. Molière sur sa comédie de l'École des femmes que plusieurs gens frondoient.*

the discussion of *The School for Wives* by a coterie of fashionables, meeting by chance at Uranie's house to gossip "over the teacups," as we should now say. Climène, the *précieuse*, Élise, a woman of fashion, a marquess, and Lysidas, a poet *à la mode*, voice popular disapproval of that play; while the hostess and Dorante, a chevalier, uphold Molière, and are, so to speak, his mouthpieces. These butterflies, painted in colours time cannot dim, are so lifelike that it is difficult to realise Uranie's drawing-room is not in the Champs Élysées quarter; for who has not known just such a woman as the hostess describes Climène to be when hearing she resents being called a *précieuse?*

She disproves the charge in name, it is true, but not in deed; for she is one from head to foot, and, besides, she is the most affected creature in the world. Her whole body seems to be out of joint; her hips, shoulders, and head apparently move only on springs, and she always affects a silly, languishing tone of voice, pouts to show a small mouth, or rolls her eyes to make them look large.

How cosmopolitan is the marquess, too, who adjudges Molière's play "the worst in the world," because, "deuce take it!" he could hardly find a seat! — an exquisite, whose critical acumen is thus asserted:

Truly, I find it detestable — detestable, egad! Detestable to the last degree. What you may call detestable. . . . Zounds! I guarantee it to be detestable. . . . It is detestable, because it is detestable!

This twaddle of a man of fashion is perhaps surpassed by the same character's answer to the assertion of Élise that she cannot digest the *pottage* or the *cream tart:*

Ah, upon my word! yes — *cream tart!* That is what I was saying earlier: Cream tart! I say, but I am obliged to you, Madam, for reminding me of cream tart. Are there enough apples in Normandy for cream tart?[1] Cream tart, egad, cream tart!

But this macaroni, like Climène, the *précieuse*, is designed only as a target for Molière's shafts; witness Dorante's retort:

Then, Marquess, you are one of those fine gentlemen who won't admit the pit has any common sense, and would be mortified to laugh with it, even were the play the best in the world. I saw one of our friends make himself ridiculous the other day in just that way by sitting a comedy out with the wryest face imaginable. Whenever anything pleased the audience, he frowned, while at each outburst of laughter he shrugged his shoulders, gave the pit a look of spite or compassion, and shouted: "Laugh away, pit, laugh away!"[2] Our friend's annoyance was a supplemental comedy, most worthily acted, and the audience was agreed it could not have been done better. I beg you to learn, my dear Marquess, and the others as well, that in the theatre common sense has no exclusive abode. The difference between half a louis and fifteen sous has nothing to do with good taste; for, either sitting or standing, you may judge badly. In short, taking it as it comes, I should be inclined to trust the approval of the pit, since among its denizens there are many capable of criticising a play according to dramatic standards, while the rest pass judgment, as indeed they ought, by letting themselves be guided by events, without blind prejudice, silly complaisance, or absurd delicacy.

[1] The apple orchards of France are in Normandy, and this fruit was the favourite projectile of the pit.

[2] Presumably an actual occurrence, since Brossette in his edition of Boileau (1716) names one "Plapisson, who passed for a great philosopher," as the author of this insulting prank.

This passage, just though it be, is surely an appeal to the "gallery gods"; but Molière, be it remembered, was an actor. Indeed this entire skit appears intended to delight his cash-paying patrons at the expense of the dandies, whose rush-seat chairs upon the stage were so seldom paid for. Furthermore, his own art is placed on trial, and he waxes warm in its defence when Dorante answers Uranie's assertion that comedy is quite as difficult to write as tragedy:

Assuredly, Madam; and as for the difficulty, if you allow comedy a trifle more than its share, you will not be far from wrong. Indeed, I think it far easier to soar aloft upon fine sentiments, beard fortune in verse, impeach destiny, and arraign the gods, than to depict the ridiculous side of human nature or make the common faults of mankind appear diverting on the stage. When you paint heroes, you make them what you choose; no likeness is sought in such fancy portraits; therefore you need only follow the winged shafts of an imagination more than likely to desert truth for the accomplishment of marvels. But when you paint men you must paint from nature; and if you do not make us recognise the men and women of our time, you have accomplished nothing. In a word, all that is necessary in serious plays is to escape censure, talk common sense, and write well. But in comedy that is not enough. You must jest, and to make honest people laugh is a strange undertaking.

An author whose comedy was playing to what a modern manager would call "capacity business," would have been preternatural did he not glory a little in his achievement; moreover, it is a pardonable revenge to take upon his critics when Uranie thus answers the poet Lysidas:

It is odd that you poets always condemn the plays the whole world rushes to see, and only speak well of those every one avoids. Toward the one you display an unconquerable hatred, toward the other an inconceivable affection.

But Molière's satire is even more delicious, his technical judgment keener, when Dorante answers the pedantic strictures of this same Lysidas as follows:

You poets are amusing fellows with those rules of yours, made only to embarrass the ignorant and deafen the rest of us. To hear you hold forth, one would think the rules of art were the greatest mysteries in the world; while in reality they are merely a few simple observations which good sense has made upon elements that might destroy the pleasure one finds in such poems. The same good sense which once made those observations now continues to make them quite as readily without the aid of Horace or Aristotle. I should like to know whether the great rule of all rules is not to please, and if a play which attains that end has not travelled a good road? Can the entire public be mistaken, and is not each one capable of judging of the pleasure he receives?

Far from convincing Molière's critics of the futility of condemning a play "the whole world rushes to see," *The Criticism of The School for Wives* served only to redouble their anger. Soon an army of revengeful scribblers began discharging replies, defences, and counter-criticisms at their arch-enemy as rapidly as they could dip their pens in noxious ink. Foremost, in point of acrimony, was Donneau de Vizé's dialogue, *Zélinde; or, The True Criticism of The School for Wives, and the Criticism of the Criticism* (*Zélinde ou la véritable critique de l'École des femmes et la Critique de la critique*), — a pamphlet wherein Molière was accused of having offended the church

morality, the stage, the court, and society: but a comedy called *The Portrait of the Painter; or, The Counter-Criticism of The School for Wives* (*Le Portrait du peintre ou la Contre-critique de l'École des femmes*) from the pen of a young writer named Boursault, which was played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne while Molière himself was seated on the stage, apparently inflicted the deepest wound upon the poet's vanity. De Vizé even accuses him of making "a wry face"[1] during this performance.

In Boursault's play Molière's comic characters, the *précieuse* and the marquess, appear in defence of *The School for Wives*, while his wiseacres attack it; thus the marquess claims it to be "admirable, egad! admirable to the last degree," and there is a story to the effect that when Molière was asked his opinion of his portrait, he answered, "Admirable, egad, admirable to the last degree!"[2]—a bit of sententiousness tempered with honest pride; for, as he said, "the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in turning my plays inside out like a coat, profited by their charm."

Fellow craftsmen, however, were not the only enemies he was obliged to encounter. One day, as he passed through an apartment of the palace, the Duc de la Feuillade, while pretending to greet him, seized his head suddenly, and crying, "Cream tart, Molière, cream tart," rubbed his face against the sharp buttons of his doublet until it bled.[3] Fortunately the King took his

[1] *Réponse à l'Impromptu de Versailles.*

[2] *Les Amours de Calotin*, a comedy by Chevalier, a comedian of the Théâtre du Marais.

[3] This story is first told in the *Life of Molière* (*Vie de Molière*) attributed to Bruzen de la Martinière, and published at The Hague in 1725; but Grimarest makes mention of a "cream tart" incident between Molière and "a courtier of distinction," while De Vizé refers in *Zélinde*

part, and reproved the recalcitrant duke; else the Bastille, rather than a nose-rubbing, might have been Molière's fate.

Boursault's play, *The Portrait of the Painter*, was an attempt to hoist Molière with his own petard, and so galled him that he penned and rehearsed a comedy, in retort, called *The Versailles Impromptu* (*L'Impromptu de Versailles*).[1]

Produced, as its name implies, before the court at Versailles, this one-act piece is in the vein of *The Criticism of The School for Wives;* but Molière's attacks upon his critics, instead of being entrusted to poets, fops, and *précieuses*, are voiced by the members of his own company, himself included, *in propriis personis*. In other words, *The Impromptu* presents the stage of his theatre during the rehearsal of a new play, in the course of

to "the cream tart adventure"; so it seems more than probable that Molière suffered this indignity. Brossette, however, says that Monsieur d'Armagnac, the grand equerry, was the author of the insult.

[1] The question whether Boursault's play preceded or followed *The Versailles Impromptu* on the boards is still a mooted one. In the latter play Molière unquestionably shows familiarity with *The Portrait;* but this might have been acquired through a reading. According to a document unearthed at Berlin, the envoy of the Elector of Brandenburg was present at the first performance of *The Portrait*, — an event occurring at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, October nineteenth, 1663; while the preface of 1682 gives October fourteenth as the date of the first production of *The Impromptu*, — facts which would apparently establish the priority of Molière's piece, were it not that La Grange, in stating that the Palais Royal company went to Versailles October eleventh and returned October twenty-third, fails to give the exact date of *The Impromptu's* production there. As the King, absent on the eleventh, did not reach Versailles until the fifteenth, evidently the new play was not presented until after his arrival. The possibility of the two comedies having been produced on the same day is suggested by M. Paul Mesnard, *Notice biographique*.

which his actors receive their stage directions and are frankly told their chief's opinion of their respective abilities. Indeed, this play is a biographical document wherein Molière shows himself in the rôle of manager, and reveals his stage business and theories of histrionic art in a way that clearly indicates his character to be at once nervous and patient, headstrong and even stubborn; moreover, he paints the eccentricities of his comrades so cleverly that they appear more lifelike than any purely biographical notice could present them; hence, besides being a polemic, this play is a realistic picture of life in Molière's company.

"Ah, what strange beasts actors are to drive!" he exclaims while distributing the parts for an imaginary play, — an opinion many a modern manager will share; and he is equally unsparing of irony when he refers to his own family relations, as the following bit of dialogue will testify:

MOLIÈRE

Be quiet, wife! You are a fool.

MLLE. MOLIÈRE [Armande Béjart]

Thanks, lord and master. That shows how marriage changes people. You would not have said that eighteen months ago.

MOLIÈRE

Be quiet, I beg you.

MLLE. MOLIÈRE

Strange that a trifling ceremony is able to rob us of all our good qualities, and that a husband and lover regard the same woman with such different eyes!

MOLIÈRE

What a sermon!

MLLE. MOLIÈRE

Upon my word, if I were to write a comedy, that would be my subject. I should acquit women of most of the charges brought against them, and make husbands afraid of the contrast between their rough manners and a lover's courtesy.

Interesting as is this side light upon Molière's domestic affairs, the fact that this play was designed and rushed to completion within eight days as a retort to Boursault's *Portrait of the Painter* should be borne in mind. A true picture of theatrical life at the beginning, including even a flirtatious marquess who besieges the stage door, it soon degenerates to a polemic wherein Molière is upheld, not over modestly, it must be confessed, and his enemies handled with scant pity. Thus Boursault, when Du Croisy speaks of *The Portrait*, is given the worst insult an author can receive — that of being dismissed as unknown — in the following:

It is advertised, sir, under Boursault's name; but, to let you into the secret, a number of men have had a hand in this work, so it is a case of great expectations. As all authors and all comedians consider Molière their greatest enemy, we are all united to do him an ill turn. Each of us has added a stroke of the brush to his portrait, but we have been careful not to sign our names to it. To capitulate beneath the eyes of the whole world before the attack of a combined Parnassus, would be too much glory; so, to render his defeat more ignominious, we have expressly chosen an author without reputation.

In the imaginary play under rehearsal, Molière allots himself the part of a comical marquess. "What, marquesses, again?" asks one of the characters when the parts are being distributed. "Yes, marquesses again," Molière answers; "what the devil would you have me

do for a low comedy character? Nowadays a marquess is the clown in a play; for, just as formerly there was always a loutish servant to amuse the audience, now all our plays must have a comical marquess to make the spectators laugh."

This bold onslaught upon the clan of marquesses certainly proves how secure Molière felt in his monarch's protection. However, when the poet speaks of his enemies, he forgets that he is playing a character part:

The worst harm I have done them is to have the good luck to succeed a little more than they wished me to. Their whole conduct since we have been in Paris shows only too clearly what annoys them; but let them do their worst! — all their schemes cannot worry me. They criticise my plays: so much the better; and Heaven forefend I should ever write any they would like! That would certainly be a piece of bad business for me.

Again, he exclaims with the desperation of a hounded man:

Courtesy must have its limits; for there are some things that can amuse neither the spectator nor the one at whom they are aimed. I gladly surrender them my works, my face, my gestures, my words, my tones of voice, my way of reciting to do with and talk about and as they see fit, if they can derive any profit therefrom. I have nothing to say against all this; and I should be enchanted if it served to divert the world; but after surrendering to them all that, they might at least have the kindness to leave me the rest, and not touch on subjects of the nature of those by which I hear they attack me in their comedies. This is what I shall politely urge upon the worthy man who undertakes to write for them, and this is all the answer they shall have from me.

As a final blow to his enemies, *The Versailles Impromptu* proved as ineffectual as *The Criticism of The School for Wives.* In the former Molière imitated the methods and mannerisms of the various actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, much after the manner of a modern impersonator, pointing out at the same time the utter disregard of nature in their heroic declamation. This was, of course, a throw of the gauntlet to the tragedians, and Corneille, too, felt himself aggrieved by the assertion that it was harder to make honest people laugh than to write tragedy; so *The Versailles Impromptu* called forth a new crop of plays and pamphlets. Robinet's *Panegyric of The School for Wives; or, A Comic Talk on the Works of M. de Molière* (*Le Panégyrique de l'École des femmes, ou Conversation comique sur les Œuvres de M. de Molière*) — in many ways the reverse of a panegyric — and De Vizé's *Reply to The Versailles Impromptu; or, The Marquesses' Revenge* (*Réponse à l'Impromptu de Versailles ou la Vengeance des marquis*) were the chief contributions of men of letters to this new attack, while the tragedians found a valiant champion in Montfleury — a ranting member of their guild — who replied to Molière's aspersions upon the art of the Hôtel de Bourgogne in *The Impromptu of the Hôtel de Condé* (*L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé*), — an uninspired comedy in which the author endeavours to repay Molière in his own coin by ridiculing his elocution and pantomime.

The stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne was the arena for this Billingsgate warfare; but Molière, wisely refraining from further controversy, permitted *The Versailles Impromptu* to be his last trial of strength with his enemies. His hapless excursion into the field of acrimony had taught him the trite but true lesson that speech is

human, silence divine. Characteristic as are the subjective passages of his two polemical plays, his reputation nevertheless suffers considerably by this descent to fish-market methods. True, the master of the art of comedy speaks; yet, when all is said, had the man Molière been content to "float upon the wings of silence," he would appear to us in a light far more dignified. Surely those acrid passages, superb though they be as tenets of the art of "making honest people laugh," tend to strip the Parnassian robes from his back and leave him a giant trembling on the pedestal of a god, far too nettled to hold his tongue while envious pygmies jeer. Sainte-Beuve once called Montaigne the wisest Frenchman that ever lived; he might have added that Molière is the most human.

XI

MOLIÈRE THE COURTIER

Since the gross receipts at the Palais Royal increased fully ninety per cent during this period of controversy, the attacks of the critics proved a boon to its treasury; moreover, the sole change in the ranks of the company was caused by De l'Espy's voluntary retirement on account of age (March twelfth); so, theatrically, 1663 was an auspicious year.

This prosperity was due in a great measure to Molière's ability "well to amuse" his monarch, — an event of such frequent occurrence that during the first five years of his sojourn in Paris the exchequer of his company was enriched by some forty thousand livres from performances given at court and in society. Though perfumed marquesses were legitimate meat for his satire, he wisely avoided even the suggestion of *lèse majesté*. He was, indeed, no "unseasoned courtier"; for the King's wishes were his law, — a policy he thus discloses in *The Versailles Impromptu:*

Kings like nothing so much as prompt obedience, and are not at all pleased at finding obstacles in their path. Things are only acceptable to them at the moment they want them, and to try to postpone their amusement is to deprive it of charm. They want pleasures that do not keep them waiting, and the least prepared are always the most acceptable. In catering to their wishes we should never consider ourselves; for we exist only to

please them; and when they command, our part is to respond quickly to their immediate desires. It is far better to do badly what they ask than not to do it soon enough; for even though one be ashamed of not having succeeded entirely, one always has the glory of having promptly obeyed their behest.

Lest Molière appear in the light of a literary toady, such as Swift, it should be borne in mind that the very roof over his head was there by the King's grace and that in courting Louis he but emulated all France. Indeed, not to recognise the debt he owed the man he was pleased to call "the greatest monarch in the world," would have been base ingratitude. That he wisely refrained from asking favours is shown by the fact that although summoned to court thirty-one times during his first five years in Paris — often for a sojourn of weeks — his name did not appear in the royal pension list until March seventeenth, 1663, a few weeks after the first performance of *The School for Wives*.

Although Corneille received two thousand livres on this same occasion, as "the first dramatic poet of the world," and Ménage, the critic, a like sum, Molière's pension was but a modest thousand, as "an excellent comic poet." Furthermore, at least twenty other writers, of whom Benserade alone has fame, were rewarded as fully as he; while only seven — among them Racine, then comparatively unknown — received less. Gratitude for official recognition at a moment when bigotry was proclaiming his *School for Wives* an assault upon morality, and, maybe, pride at being the only actor named in a pension list designed to award great scientists and men of letters, prompted him to thank his monarch for this paltry recognition of his merit.

The verses he indited for this purpose were so charming that even Robinet was forced to exclaim, "Have you seen the acknowledgment (*remercîment*) Molière has composed for his pension as a fine wit? Nothing so gallant or pleasing has been seen. It is a portrait of the court, feature by feature. You see it as if you were there: its garments, the ways of courtiers; in short, everything appears before you, even to the sound of the voices."[1]

Molière's acknowledgment is, indeed, "a portrait of the court"; for, summoning his "lazy muse," he bids her don the frills and ribbons of a marquess and attend the King's levee, in order to thank his Majesty for his precious boon. But "a muse's manner is offensive there," he warns her, "so thus disguised, you 'll pay your court far more agreeably. You know what you must do to simulate a marquess: perch a hat adorned with thirty feathers on a costly wig, and let your neckband be large, your doublet small; but, above all, I recommend a cloak with a ribbon tucked on the back; and, remember, great gallantry is required to be accounted a marquess of the first order." Chatting thus familiarly, the poet then admonishes his muse upon the way to behave when she presents his thanks: "Cross the guard room combing your hair gracefully, glance sharply about you, and do not forget to greet imperiously, by name, each one you know — no matter what his rank may be; for such familiarity gives any one a distinguished air. Scratch the King's door with your comb,[2] or if, as I

[1] *Le Panégyrique de l' École des femmes ou Conversation comique sur les Œuvres de M. de Molière.*

[2] It was customary to scratch, instead of knock, at the King's door; thus, for instance, the Baron de la Crasse, the hero of a play of that name

foresee, the crowd there is great, wave your hat from afar or climb on something to show your face, then cry out continuously, 'Mr. Usher, for the Marquess So and So.' Throw yourself into the crowd, bluster, elbow without mercy, press, push, and do your devilmost to get in front. Even should the inflexible usher shove some repugnant marquess in front of you, don't recede, but stand there firmly. To open the door, he must dislodge you; therefore stand so no one can pass, and they will be obliged to let you in, in order to let any one in. When you have entered, don't relax your efforts. To besiege the throne, you must continue the struggle; so, by conquering your ground, step by step, try to be one of the nearest to it. If preceding besiegers hold all the approaches in force, make up your mind quietly to await the prince in the passage. He will recognise you, in spite of your disguise; so pay him your compliment without further ado."

Thus, with a few bold strokes Molière paints the courtier: to his fellows, a bully; to his master, a puppy with a frill about his neck. In the closing stanza, too, he flatters Louis more than all the praise and incense of his satellites:

A prince magnificent but asks
For compliments full brief and true,
And ours, you see, has many other tasks
Than hearkening to words from you.
Untouched is he when fulsome praise he sips;
So when you try with open lips
To speak of grace or favours gay,

by Raymond de Poisson (1662), recounts that, having knocked at the King's door, the gentleman in waiting exclaimed: ". . . Apprenez donc, Monsieur de Pézenas, qu'on gratte à cette porte, et qu'on n'y heurte pas."

At once your meaning's clear, hence off he slips,
An arrow flying, straight away ;
But sweetly smiles, meantime, with manner bland,
No heart can e'er evade.
What more do you demand ?
Your compliment is paid.

One can fairly whiff the perfumed air of the throne room and see Louis trip away amid a throng of bowing marquesses with ribboned canes.

In thus revealing the real man beneath the robes of state, Molière showed how worthily he played the courtier's rôle; for a king likes to be treated as a man and equal, provided we stand just a step or two below him with hat in hand. Our poet knew that art; so he won Louis' confidence. Nevertheless there was just a grain of snobbishness in his nature; though he ploughed the field of snobs to his advantage, yet, like Thackeray, true to his middle class antecedents, he dearly loved a lord. This failing is manifested by the pertinacity with which he clung to the paltry title of *valet de chambre tapissier du roi.*

In 1645, and again in 1650, he thus signed himself to public documents, although he had previously resigned all rights to that office; while upon his brother's death, in April, 1660, he made haste to regain his lost quality; for in November of the following year he witnessed a document as *valet de chambre du roi.* To his own marriage certificate, however, the name of his father alone is signed in this manner, — possibly because the parent objected to a usurpation of his dignities.

The first published record of his appearance at court is found in 1663, when among the eight *tapissiers valets de chambre* serving during the January trimester, " M.

Poquelin and his son, in reversion" are mentioned officially.[1]

The latter was, of course, Molière, and the preceding year being the period of his marriage and long sojourn at St. Germain, it seems likely that his wife's social ambitions played no small part in causing him to assert his inherited right to make the King's bed. In the words of the Preface of 1682, "Molière fulfilled his duties at court during his quarter until his death"; but conceive the disdain with which the marquesses received this actor-upholsterer who had so frequently held them up to public scorn — this outcast unworthy to be shriven. To quote *The Versailles Impromptu*, "I leave you to imagine if all those who believed themselves satirised by Molière would not take the first occasion to avenge themselves?"

When he appeared in the royal bed-chamber, one valet de chambre openly refused to serve with him, and this sedition might have become widespread had not an amateur poet named Bellocq rebuked such snobbery by asking the offended actor if he might not have the honour of making the King's bed with him. Thus aided by a fellow craftsman, Molière gained a foothold at court; yet the picture of these two poets, gorgeous in their laces, ribbons, and perukes, smoothing the royal pillows and sheets like a pair of chambermaids, is certainly one to provoke a smile.

There is a charming sequel to this incident, which, like many stories concerning Molière, has been stamped as apocryphal. To repeat it is to court the charge of being a *persifleur*; yet, even at that risk, it shall appear once more. The officials of the privy chamber, it appears,

[1] *L'État de la France.*

showed plainly how it annoyed them to be obliged to eat at the same table with Molière; so Louis, hearing of their rudeness, said to the actor one morning during the *petit lever:*

"I hear you are badly entertained, M. de Molière, and that my people don't find you good enough to eat with them. Perhaps you are hungry. Sit down here and try my *en cas de nuit*" (a provision made in the evening in case the royal appetite should suddenly require satisfaction during the night). Then cutting a chicken and ordering Molière to be seated, the King helped him to a wing, took one himself, and gave orders that the most favoured personages of the court be admitted.

"You see, I am making Molière eat something," said Louis, "for my valets de chambre don't find him good enough company for them."

This is the incident known as the *en cas de nuit.* It is classed as legendary because it was first told in print in 1823 by a certain Madame Campan, whose father-in-law heard it from an old physician of Louis XIV, whom she failed to name; and because decorous little Saint-Simon assures us that, "save with the army, the King never ate with any man, not even a prince of the blood." However, as M. Moland aptly says, "there are always exceptions to the most positive of protocols." Ingres, Gérôme, and Vetter have painted the scene; no archæologist may destroy its charm. Let this human incident remain,—it is far too delightful to be banished by evidence no more tangible than mere conjecture![1]

[1] M. Gustave Larroumet (*La Comédie de Molière*) calls attention to the fact that the *valets de chambre tapissier* did not eat at the palace with the valets de chambre, citing in proof thereof *L'État de la France,* and thus adding, "it must be confessed a strong argument against the verisi-

When the marquesses were convinced that Molière could not be undermined in the royal favour, they paid him court with all the superciliousness of their caste. "These gentlemen," says De Vizé,[1] "often invited him to dine, but, as those who believe in their own merit never lack vanity, he returned all the cheer he received, his wit making him pass on a par with many people far above him."

He was, perhaps, the first actor since classic days to knock at society's door. Considering the obloquy the church had cast upon his calling, his success was remarkable. Even Saint-Simon, whose breviary was precedence, bears witness to it in an amusing anecdote he tells about Julie d'Angennes' husband, the Duc de Montausier. This austere nobleman, it seems, having heard he had been travestied in *The Misanthrope*, was furious until he saw the piece played; whereupon, feeling it an honour to be likened to Alceste, the hero, he sent for the author. Molière appeared with much perturbation; but the duke ran to embrace him, and, supper being announced, the actor was invited to share it. To quote Saint-Simon: "Molière, who had supped more than once with young lords during some gay carouse, had never eaten, in other circumstances, even with them; much less with a man of the dignity, age, position, and austerity of Monsieur de Montausier."[2]

Saint-Simon makes it apparent that the cabaret was the only meeting-ground for the stage and society; therefore it is easier to understand Molière's persistence in

militude of this incident; for if Molière did not eat with the gentlemen of the court, there was no cause for them to refuse to sit at table with him."

[1] *Nouvelles nouvelles.*

[2] *Écrits inédits de Saint-Simon.*

making the King's bed. Besides asserting his birthright, he thus obtained an insight into court life; for, if he dearly loved a lord, like Thackeray he dearly loved to paint one. Posterity should be grateful that he smoothed the King's sheets; for as the great English satirist himself said of the Frenchman's masterful portraits, "What fine ladies and gentlemen Molière represents!" [1]

"In catering to the wishes of kings," our poet told his actors, "we should never consider ourselves, since we exist only to please them." This doctrine is repeated here as its author's own excuse for the inferior quality of his court comedies and ballets. According to a statement in an earlier chapter, the obsequious period of his art was closely allied with the Gallic in point of time; but, more correctly speaking, its inception took place then, for time-serving plays appear in both the militant and histrionic periods. Indeed, these court comedies were Molière's quick responses to the King's "immediate desires," — in other words, a courtier's artifice.

The Bores, written to order in fifteen days, is a pleasing example of these court plays; for it has distinct charm, — a quality lacking in *The Forced Marriage* (*Le Mariage forcé*), the play which followed *The Versailles Impromptu*. Styled a comedy ballet, but in reality a one-act farce in prose, *The Forced Marriage*, as Voltaire justly says, is "more remarkable for buffoonery than for either art or charm." [2] Save for a few touches of Rabelaisian mirth, it might pass for a crude *canevas* of Molière's youth. When presented at the Louvre in Anne of Austria's apartment, January twenty-ninth, 1664, this play so pleased the royal family that it was repeated before the

[1] *The Virginians.*

[2] *Vie de Molière avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.*

court three times within a fortnight, — a success due to the King's appearance as a gypsy in one of the ballet interludes, danced to Lully's music.[1] Although given, to quote La Grange, "with the ballet and ornaments," *The Forced Marriage*, when placed upon the boards of the Palais Royal, February fifteenth, was without the allurement of Louis' dancing; so the receipts dwindled from some twelve hundred livres at the first public performance to barely two hundred at the twelfth, when it was withdrawn.

In June of the following year (1665) Molière went to Versailles with his company and presented *The Favourite* (*Le Favori*) — a comedy by Mlle. des Jardins — upon an *al fresco* stage. This performance was heightened by his own appearance in the audience disguised as a ridiculous marquess, who, despite the prearranged efforts of the guards to suppress him, carried on a humorous conversation with one of the actresses in the play, — a bit of theatrical by-play still current upon our own stage.[2]

Although Molière was ever thus ready to amuse his King, the failure of *The Forced Marriage* should have convinced him of the fallibility of his doctrine that "in catering to the wishes of monarchs we must never consider our-

[1] Giovanni Battista Lully (or Lulli) was a Florentine composer and violinist, who, joining the Royal French Orchestra in 1650, was soon thereafter appointed Director of Music to Louis XIV. He composed the music for Molière's comedy ballets, until, receiving in 1672 the privilege of establishing a Royal Academy of Music, he became so dictatorial and so tenacious of his rights that he opposed the productions of pieces with incidental music by theatrical companies, thus forcing Molière to seek the services of another composer (Charpentier) when writing his last comedy ballet (*The Imaginary Invalid*). Lully composed twenty operas, and may justly be called the founder of the French lyric drama.

[2] La Grange's *Registre*. *Le Molièriste*, April, 1881.

selves." Yet his desire to please Louis at all hazards was so great that the first act of his next effort, *The Princess of Elis* (*La Princess d'Élide*), and one scene of the second, are in Alexandrian verse, whereas prose is the vehicle for the remainder, — a perfunctory treatment, one is tempted to say slip-shod, thus excused by the poet in his Preface:

> The author's intention was to treat the entire comedy in verse; but a command from the King so hastened its completion that he was obliged to finish the remainder in prose and pass lightly over several scenes he would have expanded further had he possessed more leisure.

Hasty though it be in workmanship, its conceptive charm entitles *The Princess of Elis* to a higher rank than falls to the lot of many of the author's court plays. The scene is in an imaginary Greece, the heroine a young Diana roaming the forest in contempt of the wooers her father has gathered at his court, until Euryale, a prince of Ithaca, makes use of her own weapon, scorn. In the lovers' battle-royal which ensues, victory hovers over the contestant appearing to seek her least, until finally the contumelious princess becomes a truly feminine victim of love.

Pastoral comedy was strange ground to Molière, yet this fanciful excursion therein is so delightful that he might well have tarried longer "under the greenwood tree." Had he known Shakespeare, he would be open to the suspicion of having found "his property" on the banks of the Avon; for Elis is an imaginary realm like unto Bohemia, and Moron the jester, played by himself, a cousin-german to Touchstone; moreover the princess is a heroine whose charm is truly Shakespearian,

and Euryale a lover quite as romantic as Orlando or Florizel. In this instance, however, the poet borrowed from a Spanish comedy by Augustin Moreto, called *Scorn with Scorn* (*El Desden con el desden*), a title which strikes the key-note of both plays.

The Princess of Elis was styled "a gallant comedy interspersed with music and ballet interludes," — a subtitle justified by six ballets, wherein musicians, bears, huntsmen, whippers-in, satyrs, and shepherdesses danced and sang to music by Lully, and incidentally abetted Moron the jester in his love for Phyllis the princess's maid. Indeed, the play must have been written to a great extent around these interludes; for it was designed, primarily, to grace an *al fresco* fête.

No royal demesne could yet vie with Vaux-le-Vicomte. To eclipse the superintendent's achievement, the young monarch began to embellish his father's hunting-box at Versailles; but so great was the outlay that Colbert remonstrated, saying, "Ah, what a pity it would be should the greatest of kings, the most virtuous, in the true virtue which makes the greatest princes, be measured by the ell of Versailles!" Colbert's letter was certainly prophetic; for Louis, despite the really glorious achievements of his reign, is gauged by this ell.

In 1664, however, it was a modest measure. Only the central portion of the palace was built; the park covered only a fraction of its present extent; and of the marvellous fountains and canals the Basin of Apollo had alone been dug. Still, there was a zoölogical garden, and an orangery embellished by twelve hundred or more of Fouquet's own trees; so Versailles was sufficiently imposing to warrant Louis' choice of it as the scene of a

series of fêtes designed to outshine the superintendent's ill-starred magnificence.[1]

These were held in May, 1664, and lasting an entire week, were known as "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" (*Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*). Heretofore Benserade had been charged with the creation of court festivals; but on this occasion the Duc de Saint-Aignan, master of ceremonies, had recourse to Molière. The subject chosen was Ariosto's account, in *Orlando Furioso*, of Ruggiero the paladin's sojourn in the island palace of Alcina the enchantress. The King was allotted the part of Ruggiero, his courtiers each assuming a character in the Italian poem until every knight had found his counterpart.[2]

A circular meadow was chosen as the site of Alcina's palace, and at each entrance a portico bearing the royal arms was erected. There was a daïs, too, for Anne of Austria and Maria Theresa; since true-hearted Louise de la Vallière, though playing the rôle of Bradamante, adored of Ruggiero, was prevented by etiquette from being crowned queen of the festival.

"The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" began on the first night at the twilight hour, with a flourish of trumpets and drums to herald a king-at-arms, gorgeous in crimson and silver. With him rode the pages of Ruggiero, of the earl marshal, and of the judge of the lists, bearing their masters' shields and lances. Mounted trumpeters

[1] *La Création de Versailles*, by Pierre de Nolhac.

[2] A complete description of this astonishing spectacle, entitled *Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*, was published in 1664, and Marigny, a writer of the day, has left a spirited account of it (*Relation de Marigny*); while a series of engravings by Israël Sylvestre gives a wonderfully clear impression of the *mise-en-scène*.

and kettle-drummers followed, their banderols and timbrels glittering with blazoned suns of gold; then came the earl marshal, the Duc de Saint-Aignan, himself, armed *à la grecque* with dragoned helm and silver corselet. In his wake rode more trumpeters, sounding a fanfaron of joy to herald Louis. Resplendent in jewels and in gold, he appeared, followed by his paladins. In the words of an anonymous chronicler, "his bearing was worthy of his rank; for never had an air more free and martial placed a mortal above his fellow-men." [1]

Hardly had the loyal acclamations of Louis' subjects died away, when Milet, his coachman, arrayed as Father Time, drove Apollo's chariot upon the scene, his vehicle gorgeous in azure and gold. The divinity was the young comedian La Grange; the Ages of Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron, grouped at his feet, were Mlle. Molière (Armande Béjart), M. Hubert,[2] Mlle. de Brie, and M. du Croisy, all of Molière's company, — a triumph for the Palais Royal theatre which caused a spectator to suggest that if Father Time overturned Apollo's chariot, the Hôtel de Bourgogne would be easily consoled.[3] Indeed, the royal troupe had cause for jealousy, since not a single member graced this fête. But Apollo's chariot did not overturn; so Molière's actresses — "barn-stormers" barely six years before — triumphed over their rivals and recited verses in adulation of the queen.

A ring tilting contest followed, lasting till darkness

[1] *Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée.*

[2] An actor from the Théâtre du Marais, who had just joined Molière's forces, noted both as a female impersonator and as the author of the *Registre de Hubert*, a chronicle of the company during the years 1672–73.

[3] *Relation de Marigny.*

fell; then a myriad lights blazed upon the scene, while Lully, Orpheus of the day, entered with a choir of singers, marching to the cadence of their instruments, and followed by a grotesque cavalcade depicting the four seasons. The beautiful Du Parc, mounted on an Andalusian palfrey, represented Spring; Summer was her fat husband, Gros René, riding, appropriately, on an elephant; Autumn, La Thorillière, astride a camel; and Winter, Louis Béjart, mounted on a bear, — a whimsical stable, made possible by the proximity of the royal menagerie. Gardeners, harvesters, vintagers, and patriarchs escorted these masquerading players; and a sylvan float, heralded by hautboys and flutes, appeared, moving by imperceptible means, with Molière perched in its topmost branches as the great god Pan, and his wife as Diana, queen of the night.

When these woodland deities had recited verses to the queen, a ballet symbolical of the Hours of the Day and the Signs of the Zodiac was danced to Lully's measures; meantime the comptrollers of the King's household laid tables weighed with "laughter, sport, and delight" — a contemporary way of saying good things — before the royal daïs; whereupon their Majesties and the attendants partook of a banquet "whose magnificence," in the words of a chronicler, "was comparable to the ancient feasts of the gods."[1]

Moved to a woodland dell on the second day, Alcina's palace became a verdant theatre; and there, when the sun had set, Ruggiero and his valiant paladins were regaled by *The Princess of Elis*. The title rôle of this comedy was filled by Armande Béjart, Molière playing Moron the jester. In an engraving of the scene Israël

[1] *Relation de Marigny.*

Sylvestre depicts a stage as wide as that of the Milanese Scala, with a depth surpassing it. The actors wear flowing robes and plumed helmets — the pseudo-classic costume of the time — and the trains of the actresses are carried by pages ; so the ballet interludes, wherein bears, huntsmen, fauns, and shepherdesses abetted Molière's buffooneries, were certainly in marked contrast to this stateliness. Yet, according to a contemporary, the audience found the performance "so excellent, complete, and delightful" that this apparent temerity proved sound theatrical judgment.

On the third day Mlle. du Parc, representing Alcina the sorceress, and Mlles. Molière[1] and de Brie, as two nymphs, floated about the basin now dedicated to Apollo, on the backs of huge wooden sea monsters, and recited verses in honour of Anne of Austria, — a diversion followed by a ballet of giants, dwarfs, and demons dancing to the strains of the royal violins. Meantime Alcina's palace, built upon a rocky isle, blazed forth in fireworks so magnificent that the spectators believed "the sky, the earth, and the water all were ablaze!"

This final burst of pyrotechnic glory ended "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle"; but the King tarried on at Versailles, cutting the Turk's head *à l'allemande*, and distributing costly gifts to the ladies by means of a lottery. In these supplemental gaieties Molière played an important rôle. On Sunday, May eleventh, *The Bores* was performed in a salon of the palace, with ballet interludes danced to music by Beauchamp; on the following day the first three acts of *The Hypocrite* (*Le Tartuffe*) were

[1] After her marriage Armande Béjart was known as Mlle. Molière, the word *Mademoiselle* being used to describe married women of lesser rank ; *Madame* being confined to ladies of the court.

presented, while on Tuesday, the thirteenth, *The Forced Marriage* was given.[1]

Molière's triumph was now complete, his hold upon the King's favour firmly established. In August, 1665, Louis granted his troupe an annual pension of six thousand livres, but of far more significance was his request to Monsieur that the patronage of Molière's company be ceded to him. Henceforth the Palais Royal players were known as "The King's Troupe," and, the company of the Hôtel de Bourgogne being styled "The Royal Troupe," it is apparent that in thus distinguishing Molière's organisation Louis desired to indicate his personal consideration and proprietorship.

At every royal fête the actor poet — a veritable buffoon laureate — was expected to provide cleverness and mirth. His numerous comedy ballets were all written for such a purpose. In September, 1665, he composed in five days a three-act prose comedy of this nature, called *Love as a Doctor* (*L'Amour médecin*), which was performed at Versailles. In December of the following year *Mélicerte*, — styled *An Heroic Pastoral*, — only two acts of which were completed, was played at a fête at St. Germain, known as "The Ballet of the Muses"; while a comic pastoral from his pen and a comedy ballet entitled *The Sicilian; or, Love as a Painter* (*Le Sicilien ou l'Amour peintre*) were also presented on this occasion. The last of these Voltaire called the first one-act piece in the language "possessing both grace and charm"; still it is but an agreeable trifle which might serve as a framework for an opera bouffe.

[1] *The Hypocrite* forms the subject of the ensuing chapter. The part played by "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" in Molière's domestic affairs is treated fully in Chapter XIII.

In 1668 a fête rivalling "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" was held at Versailles in celebration of the conclusion of the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. On this occasion Louis spent a hundred thousand livres in a single evening, and Molière provided a comedy which, in the precious language of Mlle. de Scudéry, "was interspersed with the most surprising and marvellous symphony ever known, in which several scenes were sung by the most beautiful voices in the entire world, and with divers amusing ballets." This comedy was *George Dandin*, that delightful satire upon peasants who wish to rise above their station. For the fête held at Chambord, in 1669, Molière wrote *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, the original of many succeeding farces in which a country lout has the temerity to court a pretty girl; and in the year following the King himself suggested the subject for a five-act comedy, with ballet interludes, known as *The Magnificent Lovers* (*Les Amants magnifiques*). This collaboration with Louis perhaps accounts for the stilted dulness of this later play, — the most uninteresting in the entire range of Molière's work. In 1670, too, *The Burgher, a Gentleman*, the only one of Molière's comedy ballets, save *The Imaginary Invalid*, that takes high rank among his works, was produced before the court at Chambord; and in 1671 *Psyche*, a so-called tragedy ballet dealing with Cupid's familiar love story, was put forth hurriedly for the carnival. This latter play is perhaps the most remarkable piece of collaboration in dramatic literature. Molière had time only to sketch the idea and indite a part of the verses; so Corneille was called upon to finish them, while Quinault wrote the words to the songs, and Lully the music. Again, at St. Germain in 1671, *The Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, a one-act comedy ballet,

was produced before the court. *The Imaginary Invalid*, however, though intended for court production, was first presented at the Palais Royal.

George Dandin, *The Burgher, a Gentleman*, and *The Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, though first produced at court, are comedies of such distinctive merit that they fall more naturally within the category of histrionic plays which form the topic of a succeeding chapter, while *Love as a Doctor* and *The Imaginary Invalid*, so essentially a part of the persistent warfare Molière waged against the quackery of his time, are militant comedies, treated in the chapter devoted to Molière and the physicians. The others, *Mélicerte*, *The Sicilian*, *The Magnificent Lovers*, and *Psyche*, neither Gallic in subject nor Moliéresque in treatment, because lacking in the quality of truth, the hallmark of Molière's genius, are undeserving of special comment here.

This recital of Molière's court plays should indicate how thoroughly he merited his pension; not for the surpassing nature of this form of work so much as for his readiness "to respond quickly to the King's immediate wishes." Indeed, these comedy ballets may be passed by with the assurance that they present ample evidence of the poet's sincerity in believing that "even though one be ashamed of not having succeeded entirely, one always has the glory of having promptly obeyed the King's behest."

His court plays gave him the opportunity of winning his monarch's good will, while in fulfilling his functions as valet de chambre, he was brought in personal contact with the King, and, being a shrewd observer, he might readily have seized an opportune moment to advance his fortunes. Yet his regard for Louis was something more than a courtier's stratagem. In the words of M. Bazin:

From the moment these two men, placed so far apart in the social order, saw and understood each other — the one a king freed from all restraint, the other an unequalled comedian but still timid moralist — a tacit understanding was established between them, permitting the subject to dare everything, and promising him full assurance and protection upon the sole condition that the monarch be amused. . . . He, to whom all things were thus permitted, was no knight-errant, fulfilling his mission at his proper risk and peril, exposed to vengeance, and fearing to be abandoned to his fate. A caprice of sovereign power, for once enlightened, gave him confidence and strength; his genius gave him the rest.[1]

Although M. Gustave Larroumet[2] is inclined to believe that the protection Louis XIV extended to Molière was slighter than that shown such men as Boileau and Racine, still, as this writer himself remarks, "We must first of all bear in mind the state of public opinion regarding Molière. In the eyes of his contemporaries, his profession and the character of his works created a notable difference between him and other poets." In other words, he was an actor in an age when the members of his profession were social outcasts. That Louis was so complaisant regarding so many trenchant satires of his courtiers is proof sufficient that Molière possessed the monarch's affection to a marked degree.

Shrewd Mazarin once said of Louis that there was "the wherewithal in him for four good kings and one honest man." Though the truth of the first part of this apothegm is apparent, save as regards the qualifying adjective, the wherewithal for the one honest man might

[1] *Notes historiques sur la vie de Molière.*

[2] *La Comédie de Molière.*

be a matter of considerable doubt were it not for the King's generous treatment of his favourite comedian. "Laughter," says Carlyle, "is the cipher-key wherewith we decipher the whole man"; and it was the talent of the one to kindle, and of the other to be warmed by, the fire of honest fun which made these geniuses of comedy and kingship each understand the other.

XII

THE POET MILITANT

In *Les Précieuses ridicules* Molière, ceasing to be Italian, became truly Gallic; in *The Hypocrite* (*Le Tartuffe*) knight-errantry appears. Cant is the enemy, mocking portraiture the lance; yet the play is not quixotic, for the poet's knighthood lies solely in the boldness of his attack upon false piety at a moment when pharisaism was abroad in the land. The first three of this play's five acts were produced at Versailles during the fête known as "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle," and so great was the animosity they inspired that five years elapsed before permission was obtained for a public performance. To understand the persecution Molière underwent at the hands of the clericals, a cursory glance at his inimitable comedy is necessary.

The scene is laid in Paris at the house of Orgon, a pious bourgeois who has aroused the anger of his family by introducing into its midst Tartuffe, a canting devotee whom he has met at church and whose unwitting tool he has become. Orgon's mother alone, of all his family, has been deceived by this hypocrite's feigned piety. In the opening scene the wife, daughter, son, brother-in-law, and maid-of-all-work of the atrabilious master of the house hold an indignant though futile meeting to rid themselves of the hateful creature which has fastened his tentacles upon them.

Madame Pernelle, the stubborn mother, Elmire, the artful wife whose worldly knowledge is her safeguard, Mariane, the timid daughter, Damis, the impetuous son, Cléante, the sane and honest brother-in-law — "the opposite of Tartuffe," to quote Sainte-Beuve, "his counterweight" — each is a human type as distinct as consummate art can paint it. Dorine, too, — the confidential slave of classic comedy metamorphosed into a family servant, — is a character frank and sprightly enough to test the powers of even the cleverest soubrette; while Valère, Mariane's suitor, with his flavour of the court, adds the note of distinction so necessary in bringing the *bourgeoisie*[1] of this household into the high light.

The most striking character is, of course, Tartuffe, the hypocrite. The manner of his introduction is indeed ingenious. Throughout two acts he is only spoken of by the other characters; yet his presence is always felt, and so great is the animosity created toward him that, when he finally appears, one is only too ready to join the cabal against him. For instance, after the family conference has come to naught, Dorine tells Cléante that Orgon, his brother-in-law,

> Since by Tartuffe beguiled is like a dolt.
> He calls him brother, and his love for him
> Is full a hundredfold more deep than love
> For mother, daughter, wife, or only son.
> He is his one fond gossip, in good sooth,

[1] M. Ch. L. Livet, writing in the *Moliériste*, February, 1880, makes an interesting argument to prove that both Orgon and Tartuffe were gentlemen of the court. The present writer, however, holds to the *bourgeoisie* of this family, — certainly a servant of the type of Dorine could be found only in a middle class household.

The circumspect director of his deeds,
Whom he caresses, hugs more tenderly,
I swear, than any mistress might expect.
At table in the foremost seat he 's placed,
And joyfully he sees him eat for six ;
Makes others cede him all the choicest bits,
And if he belches, cries, " God bless you, friend !"
In short, he is a fool, whose only hero
Is this one man who has become his all ;
Whose every word he hangs upon or quotes
As from an oracle, whose slightest act
Appears to him a miracle divine.
The other, knowing well his dupe, makes most
Of him, confounding him in fivescore ways,
And dazzling him so shrewdly that each hour
He pharisaically steals his coin,
Boldly proclaiming right to chide us all.

This sanctimonious scoundrel's portrait is again painted when Orgon himself, returning from a visit to the country, inquires anxiously after his beloved friend, and, learning from Dorine that " he is marvellously well, — fat, sleek, with ruddy cheek and rosy lip," exclaims most tenderly, " Poor man ! " Hearing that his wife had no appetite the previous night, although Tartuffe, supping with her *tête-à-tête*, devoutly ate a brace of partridges and half a leg of hashed mutton, the dupe again cries, " Poor man ! " and when he learns that although his wife was bled, Tartuffe bore the ordeal so nobly that he drank four draughts of wine to make up for the blood she had lost, he exclaims in one final outburst of compassion, " Poor man ! "

To realise fully the insidious way in which the canting villain of this play has hoodwinked his benefactor, one must turn to the description Orgon gives Cléante, his brother-in-law, of their first meeting:

You would be glad to know him, brother dear, —
Your ecstasy would never have an end.
He is a man ... who ... ah ! ... a man ... a man
In short, who following his precepts well
Enjoys a mind of perfect peace, and treats
The world as so much dirt. Since converse with him
I 'm wholly changed. He separates my soul
From friendships dear, instructing me to love
Nothing of earth ; so with least pain I 'd bear
The death of brother, mother, children, wife.

CLÉANTE

My brother, those are human sentiments !

ORGON

Ah, had you seen him as I saw him first
With me you would have shared this love profound!
Each day to church he came with humble air
To kneel and face me, draw the eyes of all
Upon him by the fervour of his prayers
To God. He sighed, and in a transport deep
Kissed him the earth with ardour meek, unceasing,
Rising when I did, following in my steps,
Proffering holy water at the door.
His serving lad, who imitates him well
In everything, told me his poverty,
And who he was. I made him little gifts,
But, shrinking, he would e'er return a part.
" It is too much," he said, " too much by half,
I am unworthy of your sympathy,"
And when I would not take my largess back,
He gave it to the poor, before my eyes.
At last, inspired by holy light, I brought
Him to my house ; and from that blessèd day
All 's prosperous here. He censures everything,
And even of my honour takes great care ;
For when bold wooers glance upon my wife,
Quick warning of the peril comes to me —
My jealousy he multiplies sixfold.

> The height to which his zeal doth carry him
> You 'd scarce believe: within himself he deems
> A trifle mortal sin. Why, yesterday,
> He blamed himself for killing, while at prayer,
> A flea, in anger too tempestuous.

After presenting this picture of pharisaism, Molière, fearing no doubt, its effect, is careful to portray the difference between hypocrisy and piety in the scene where Cléante, seeking to undeceive his brother-in-law, tells Orgon that —

> Just as some to bravery make pretence,
> So in religion there are hypocrites.
> Yet as the hero makes but little noise
> When honour calls, the truly pious man,
> Whose footsteps we should tread, makes no grimace.

This sane reasoning fails, however, of its object; likewise Cléante's efforts in behalf of Mariane and Valère, the lovers for whose happiness he had been commissioned in an earlier scene to plead. When he broaches the subject of their marriage, Tartuffe's dupe is evasive. Hinting that he will fulfil the will of Heaven in disposing of his daughter's hand, he leaves Cléante apprehensive of some mishap to Mariane's love, — a fear soon realised; for in an opening scene of the second act Orgon tells Mariane that he has selected Tartuffe to be her husband. This announcement causes Dorine the maid to assert that "a man who weds his daughter to a husband she loathes is responsible to Heaven for her sins"; yet in spite of the wisdom of a doctrine French parents in general might so well take to heart, Orgon tells Mariane:

> In short, my child, you must obedience pay,
> And to my choice the fullest deference show.

Dorine chides her too submissive mistress for "permitting such a foolish proposition to be made without a protest"; but Mariane, a French *jeune fille par excellence*, though acknowledging her love for Valère, prefers death to disobedience, because, to quote her own words,

> A father, I confess, such empery holds
> No hardihood was mine to make reply.

Valère, however, does not so readily adhere to the fifth commandment. On learning of his betrothed's submission to her father's will, he parts from her in high dudgeon, only to return, lover-like, before he is even out of the house, and become reconciled through Dorine't intervention, learning at the same time from that sage domestic's lips that "all lovers are fools," and from Mariane's that —

> I cannot answer for my father's will;
> Yet I shall marry no one but Valère.

This reassurance, accompanied by Dorine's discreet suggestion to the lovers that "one had better go this way, and the other that," brings the second act to a close. The third begins with a tempest of rage at the proposed marriage of his sister, on the part of Orgon's hotheaded son, Damis. "May lightning finish me on the spot!" he exclaims, "may I be proclaimed the greatest rascal alive, if any respect or authority hinders me from doing something rash. . . . I must stop this fellow's schemes!" "Softly," whispers politic Dorine. "Leave both him and your father to your step-mother — she has influence with Tartuffe. . . . In short, she has sent for him to sound him upon this marriage."

Damis, insisting upon playing the eavesdropper at this

interview, hides in a closet just as Tartuffe appears *in propria persona*. Throughout two acts this wretch has hung in the wings like a cresset of woe, shedding a baleful light upon the other characters. When his voice is heard, speaking "off stage" to his servant, there is no doubt that he is Tartuffe, the hypocrite:

> My scourge and haircloth shirt, you 'll put away;
> Pray then to Heaven, Laurent, for its light.
> Should callers come, you 'll say I 'm at the gaol
> Giving away the alms I have received.

"What affectation, what boasting!" Dorine exclaims, and, being about to address him, Tartuffe restrains her until he has covered her bare neck with his handkerchief, "lest by such sights the soul be wounded and evil thoughts awakened."

When Orgon's wife appears, the full depth of the hypocrite's perfidy is made apparent. Being asked if it is true that her husband wishes to give him her stepdaughter's hand, he replies that such a hint has been made him, but that he "has beheld elsewhere the marvellous attractions of the bliss which forms the sole object of his desires." His hypocritical love-making and Elmire's naïve manner of extracting the secret of his villainy are best told in the words of the play:

> ELMIRE
>
> I know full well your sighs toward Heaven tend,
> And nothing here below your passion stirs.
>
> TARTUFFE
>
> The love we feel for everlasting grace,
> Our love for earthly beauty leaves unquenched.
> By Heaven's work, our senses soon are charmed
> Most readily. Within your sex its light

Reflected shines : in you its glories are
Displayed ; for in your face it has disclosed
Consummate miracles, our eyes to dazzle,
Our hearts to thrill. O creature most superb,
I 've never seen your charms, but I beheld
The Author of us all, and felt my heart
Beat hard with soul-entrancing love for you,
The perfect portrait painted of Himself.
At first I felt this secret love might prove
A devil's snare ; so fearing you might be
A bar to my salvation, my poor heart
Resolved your eyes so beautiful to spurn.
That passion such as mine could be no sin
I knew at last, thou too engaging beauty,
And saw that I might well conciliate
My love with purity ; and that is how
My heart abandoned all. I know indeed
It is audacity beyond compare
To tender you that heart; but I expect
From goodness such as yours, infinity,
And nothing from the weakness of my love.
My hope is you, my peace, my happiness !
On you depends my bliss, my torment, too ;
For by your sole decree my fate is sealed —
Happiness or misery as you please.

ELMIRE

Your declaration is, forsooth, gallant ;
But most astounding, too, to say the least.
Far better you should arm your heart, methinks,
And ponder somewhat on your rash design.
A devotee like you, proclaimed by all —

TARTUFFE

Though devotee, I 'm none the less a man.
On first beholding beauty heavenly
As yours, a heart will yield but cannot reason.
I know that such discourse surpassing strange
Must seem from me ; but after all, Madame,
I am no angel, so, if you condemn

My declaration, you must blame your charms.
As soon as I beheld your superhuman
Loveliness, you became the sovereign dear
Who rules my soul. Your glance divine broke down
With godlike sweetness my resisting heart,
Conquering everything — my fasting, prayer,
And tears, — and turned unto your beauty all
My vows. Each look, each sigh, has told you this
A thousand times, until, to tell it better,
I must my voice employ. If you, benign,
Will gaze upon the sorrows of your slave,
Unworthy me, if your sweet charity
Will solace, if you 'll stoop to nothingness
Like me, I shall ever love you, most sweet
Miracle, with a love unparalleled.
Your honour's safe with me, you need not fear
Disgrace. Those courtiers whom your sex adores,
Are boastful of their deeds, and vain of word.
The favours they receive are soon divulged.
Their wagging tongues betray and desecrate
The sacrificial altar of their passion ;
But love burns prudently in men like me —
For ever is the secret wisely kept.
The care we take to guard our honour's name
Is shield enough unto the one adored :
In us you 'll find when you accept our hearts,
Love without scandal, pleasure without fear.

Having led Tartuffe thus to avow himself, Elmire, by promising not to divulge his passion to her husband, is on the point of making him renounce Mariane's hand, when Damis, rushing from his hiding-place, exclaims in blundering anger, " No, madame, no, this shall be made public ! " and despite Elmire's endeavours to prevent scandal, goes forthwith to undeceive his father and " lay bare the heart of a villain." When Orgon asks Tartuffe if " what he has heard is true," that worthy, feigning humility, convinces the dupe of his innocence by the very frankness of his confession :

Yes, my brother, I am a wretched sinner,
Guilty, corrupt, and with defilement stained—
The greatest scoundrel of all time; for all
My life is tainted with impurity
And a mere slough of sin and filthiness.
I see that Heaven for my punishment
Means now to mortify me; so whate'er
The crime with which I may be charged, no wish
Nor vanity have I to exculpate
Myself. Believe the cry of scandal, arm
Your indignation, drive me from your hearth
A felon proved! For what disgrace soe'er
Is heaped upon me, I have earned still more.

This master-stroke of self-depreciation turns Orgon's wrath upon Tartuffe's accuser. "Traitor," he cries to his son, "dare you tarnish the purity of his virtue by this falsehood"; then, denouncing children, wife, and servants as "a pack conspiring to drive a pious man from the house," he announces that Mariane shall wed his friend forthwith. When Damis refuses to kneel and beg forgiveness of Tartuffe, the infuriated Orgon turns his contumacious son out of the house; and in proof of his confidence bids Tartuffe be frequently seen with his wife, and straightway swears he'll deed him all his property; "for," as he says, "the faithful and honest friend whom I take for a son-in-law is dearer to me than son, wife, or parents." "Heaven's will be done!" the hypocrite exclaims as the curtain falls upon this picture of credulity and guile, painted so truthfully that we see and know hypocrisy for evermore.

Two more acts were added after the first performance at Versailles. In one, Elmire convinces Orgon of Tartuffe's villainy by inducing her stubborn lord to hide beneath a table while his friend avows his unholy passion; in the other, Tartuffe, unmasked, attempts to turn his

benefactor out of house and home by means of a bailiff of his own cloth, and a writ of possession taken under the deed of gift of Orgon's fortune. He even accuses his dupe of high treason on evidence confided to him in trust; but coming with an officer to arrest him, he, instead, is borne to prison.

In arresting this arch-hypocrite, the officer pays the following subtle tribute to the King:

> A prince, the mortal enemy of fraud,
> Rules over us — a prince whose eyes all hearts
> Illuminate, and are themselves deceived
> By no impostor's art. With judgment rare
> Endowed, his splendid soul surveys all things
> With equity, and is by passion ne'er
> Led far afield; nor sinks his reason firm
> To any base excess. For worthy men
> Immortal fame he holds; unblinded burns
> His zeal, while love for truth ne'er shuts his heart
> Against the horror falsehood should excite.

After explaining that the monarch thus praised has detected Tartuffe in his villainy, the officer tells Orgon that the deed of his property is annulled and his supposed treason pardoned. This is certainly a trite method of untying a clever knot; yet it is idle to criticise a masterpiece. *The Hypocrite* is one of the great comedies of the world, and will ever live as containing an abhorrent picture of human duplicity. Never, save in *The Misanthrope*, did Molière's genius rise to such a height.

To understand the sensation this comedy created, a glance at the religious situation is necessary. There were then two parties within the French church, — the Jesuits and the Jansenists. The former were men of the world, seeking to guide religion along expedient paths; the latter, deriving their name from Jansen, a reformer who

died in 1638, were Puritan idealists demanding church reform. The Jesuits denounced Jansen's denial of the freedom of will and the possibility of man's resisting grace — a creed not unlike Calvinism — as heresy, and when the Holy See issued a bull of condemnation against these doctrines in 1653, the Jansenists, in retreat at their convent at Port Royal, were led by Antoine Arnauld to wage such a wordy warfare of defence that they became the object of violent persecution. Though bravely defended by Pascal in his famous *Provincial Letters* (*Lettres provinciales*), Arnauld was expelled from the Sorbonne and eventually driven from France; nevertheless, he was upheld by a large party, including some sixteen bishops and twenty doctors of the Sorbonne, while many prominent nobles, the Prince de Conti, Molière's former protector, among them, were zealous converts to Jansenism.

During this controversy religious animosity ran high; and Molière's play appearing in the midst of it, each party discovered in Tartuffe a portrait of the other. His scourge and haircloth shirt might easily pass for a skit upon the austerities practised at Port Royal; yet his philosophy is Jesuitical, according to the popular definition of that company's casuistry. For instance, the following logic used by Tartuffe to tempt Elmire from the paths of virtue, while her husband listens beneath a table, has frequently been considered a travesty upon the Jesuitical doctrine of *Direction of Intention:*

> Those idle fears, Madame, I can dispel;
> I know the art of pacifying doubts.
> Some pleasures, truly, are inhibited
> By God; yet easily with Him we can
> Accommodate ourselves. To stretch the bonds

Of conscience in accordance with our needs
And reconcile the evil of an act
With purity of purpose is a science.
These secrets I 'll impart to you, Madame :
Be led by me, my passion gratify,
And have no further fear. I 'm liable
For all ; upon myself I take the sin.[1]

Tartuffe might readily pass for a Jesuit among that society's enemies ; to the present generation, at least, there is little in his character suggesting Arnauld or his zealous followers, — by far the most sincere churchmen of their day. In the seventeenth century, however, the Jansenists, a radical opposition minority in church politics, were held in a very different light by their conservative opponents ; moreover, they were violent enemies of the theatre, even advocating its abolition ; hence the natural foes of Molière. M. Mesnard[2] cites a statement by Brossette to the effect that " the King hated the Jansenists, whom he regarded . . . for the most part, as the real subjects of Molière's comedy," and quotes the Abbé Joly as saying that " many people have pretended Molière had Port Royal in mind, and particularly M. Antoine Arnauld, who is satirised in the scene where Tartuffe says he has devoutly eaten two partridges and half a leg of hashed mutton."

Roquette, a fashionable churchman who was " Mazarin's man-of-all-work and a servant of the Jesuits," was thought by some of his contemporaries to have been Tartuffe's original ; likewise Charpy, Sieur de Sainte-

[1] M. Auger (*Œuvres de Molière*) calls attention to the scene in Act V, where Orgon, in speaking of Tartuffe, uses the expression " sous un beau semblant" as savouring of a Jesuitical doctrine, on " Mental Restrictions."

[2] *Œuvres de Molière.*

Croix. Tallemant des Réaux, too, recounts the declaration of a certain Abbé de Pons to Ninon de Lenclos as having inspired the line:

Though devotee, I 'm none the less a man.

Furtnermore, the Duchesse de Longueville, a fervent Jansenist, has been indicated as the Elmire to whom Tartuffe paid his suit; while the Prince de Conti has been called the original of Orgon. It has remained for a modern writer, however, to propound the theory that Molière's comedy was written at the express command of Louis XIV to ridicule the Jansenists.[1]

These attempts to discover the original of Tartuffe are, in reality, unwitting compliments to the poet's genius. Each man saw his neighbour portrayed, — a fact well indicated in a letter of Racine's regarding a reading of the play at the Duchesse de Longueville's, postponed on account of the expulsion of some Jansenist nuns from their convent. "These people have been told," says Racine, referring to the Jansenists, "that the Jesuits had been satirised in this comedy," but he adds that the Jesuits "flattered themselves it was aimed at the Jansenists."

Tartuffe's original was, in all probability, not an individual or sect, but a peculiar kind of pharisee known as a director of conscience (*directeur de conscience*) which the religious revival of Louis XIV's reign had brought into fashion. Often a layman like Tartuffe, the director of conscience was employed by wealthy families in addition to the confessor as a spiritual guide charged with the regulation of its members' daily actions. The women were apparently his chief care; for, according to La

[1] *Le Tartuffe par ordre de Louis XIV* by Louis Lacour.

Bruyère,[1] "they confided to him their joys, griefs, hopes, and jealousies, their hatreds and their loves," while he was seen with them "in their carriages, in the streets, and on the promenade, and seated beside them at church and in the theatre." Certainly such a personage is nearer the reality of Molière's hypocrite than any Jansenist or Jesuit partisan. That the poet had these professional conscience directors in mind, is evinced by the following lines, spoken by Cléante in contempt of the class to which Tartuffe belonged:

> Those downright cheats, those devotees for hire
> Whose sacrilegious and deceitful smirks
> Revile the sacred, holiest precepts
> Of mankind, boldly making them a jest —
> Those men with soul by interest subdued
> Who make both wares and calling of their faith,
> Who by false glances and feigned rapture seek
> Both dignities and confidence to buy.[2]

Furthermore, Dorine speaks of Tartuffe as the "circumspect director" of Orgon's deeds (*de ses actions le directeur prudent*), while that hypocrite himself, when telling Elmire that "love burns prudently in men like me," speaks of himself as belonging to a class, by using *we* and *us* instead of the more natural pronouns *I* and *me*.[3]

[1] *Les Caractères.*

[2] Alexis Veselovsky in a *Study of Tartuffe* (*Etudy o Molierie. Tartuffe. Istoria tipa i piesy. Monographia.* Aleksieia Veselovskayo), published in Moscow in 1879, treats the possible originals of Molière's hypocrites, particularly the *directors of conscience*, exhaustively. Having no knowledge of Russian, the present writer has only been able to gather Mr. Veselovsky's views, second hand, by means of French reviews. Mr. Henry M. Trollope, too, in his *The Life of Molière* discusses the directors of conscience at considerable length, and presents some thoughtful conclusions, indicating that they were the originals of Molière's Tartuffe.

[3] See page 208.

The latest theory regarding the original of Tartuffe is advanced by M. Raoul Allier.[1] According to this writer there had existed in France since 1627 a religious body called the Society of the Holy Sacrament, — not a sect, but an association of men and women within the church working for moral purity and the strict observance of religion. Founded upon high moral principles, this organisation, though counting among its members many people of high standing, gradually became an asylum for hypocrites; and it was against these that Molière, according to M. Allier, directed his satire. The peculiar wording of Dorine's speech in which she refers to Tartuffe as "the circumspect director" of Orgon's deeds would indicate that the director of conscience was the original of Molière's Tartuffe. However, the members of the Society of the Holy Sacrament were doubtless spiritual directors as well.

That hypocrites, such as Tartuffe, were rife at the time is indicated in a story told by the Abbé de Châteauneuf,[2] about a reading of the play to Ninon de Lenclos which caused her to sketch a portrait from life of a hypocrite of the same stamp as Tartuffe, with whom she had just had an adventure. This was painted in such "lively colours," to quote the Abbé, "that if the play had not been written, Molière avowed he would not have undertaken it, so incapable was he of putting on the stage anything as perfect as Ninon's Tartuffe."

The name *Tartuffe* is another indication that Molière's satire was aimed at hypocrites in general rather than at a particular sect. In Old French, according to M. Mesnard, the word *truffe* signified *deceit*, and when used to

[1] *La Cabale des dévots.*

[2] *Dialogue sur la musique des anciens.*

denote a truffle was written *tartufle* (in Italian *tartufo*). So perfect was Molière's picture of hypocrisy that *tartufe*, written with one *f*, has become a French word signifying "hypocrite." In this connection M. Littré, the lexicographer, says:

> Molière, who spelt it *Tartuffe*, borrowed the word from the Italian, *Tartufo* being used in Lippe's *Malmantile* in the sense of a man of evil mind.[1]

This reference to *Malmantile* leads to the inevitable discussion of the sources from which Molière drew his play. Regnier's *Macette*, an Italian comedy called *The Hypocrite* (*L'Ipocrito*) by Pietro Aretino, a farce called *The Hypocritical Doctor* (*Il Dottor bacchettone*) attributed to Bonvicino Gioannelli, another called *The Basilisk of Bernagasso* (*Il Basilisco del Bernagasso*) and *The Novel of the Hypocrites* (*La Nouvelle des Hypocrites*) by Scarron are various anterior satires of hypocrisy in which scholars have discovered some likeness to *The Hypocrite*. Boccaccio, too, has been haled into court; yet Molière's comedy is convincing evidence that in literature it is not a crime to steal. The crime lies in not bettering the stolen goods, — an offence which can never be laid at our poet's door. In the words of Lessing: "The public has no interest in learning where Molière finds his subjects to divert it. 'If it be by theft,' the public assures itself, 'we humbly and politely pray the other poets to be so kind as to steal in the same way.'"

After the first three acts were played at Versailles on

[1] Lippe's *Malmantile* was not printed until 1676, but is stated to have been circulated in manuscript in France previous to that date. M. H. Monin in the *Molièriste*, July, 1866, urges that *tartuffe* is derived from *cartufle*, — a word used in the South of France to signify "potato" — German, *kartoffel*.

May twelfth, 1664, *The Hypocrite* was attacked so strenuously on the ground of impiety that the King forbade its public representation, although permitting the author to read and even perform it in society. The Court Gazette announced that "His Majesty, fully enlightened in everything, considered it absolutely injurious to religion, and capable of producing the most dangerous consequences," yet the official description of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" conveys the impression that the King's proscription was inspired solely by state polity.

The impression that the King's proscription was politically inspired is further substantiated by the permission he gave Molière to read his play before Chigi, the papal legate, at Fontainebleau during the summer of 1664. This prelate, officially engaged in the distribution of indulgences, apparently granted one to Molière's play, since in the first of three petitions to the King for permission to play *The Hypocrite* in public, the poet speaks of having won the approbation of Monsieur le Légat.

Almost simultaneously with this reading before the emissary of the Holy See, Pierre Roullé, a doctor of the Sorbonne and priest of the parish of St. Bartholomew, announced in print that —

> A man, or rather a demon clothed in the flesh yet dressed as a man, and the most notorious and ungodly libertine the world has ever known, has been so impious as to send forth from his diabolical mind a play now ready to be given to the public by being played at his theatre, which scoffs at the entire church, and derides the most sacred character, the most divine function, and all that is holiest in the church.[1]

[1] *Le Roi glorieux au monde ou Louis XIV le plus glorieux de tous les rois du monde.*

Furthermore, this outraged churchman assures us that the King, besides proscribing *The Hypocrite*, had ordered Molière, "under pain of death, to tear, stifle, and burn all of it that he had written."

Roullé's sentiments were apparently father to his statements; since, far from executing this sentence, the King permitted three acts of Molière's comedy to be played at Villers-Cotterets in September before the Duc d'Orléans and members of the royal family; while in November the entire play was performed for the great Condé at Raincy.[1]

From the first the victor of Rocroy had been a partisan of Molière's comedy. In the preface to its first edition the author himself tells us that the King, having asked Condé why a comedy called *Scaramouche a Hermit* (*Scaramouche ermite*) failed to irritate the people who were so greatly scandalised by *The Hypocrite*, the soldier replied that:

"*Scaramouche* laughs at Heaven and religion, about which these gentlemen care nothing; while Molière's comedy laughs at themselves,— a thing they cannot tolerate."

Condé's epigram sounds the key-note of the persecution to which Molière was subjected. The hypocrites could ill afford to be laughed at; therefore, to shield

[1] The 1682 edition of Molière's works states that *The Hypocrite*, "perfect, entire, and finished in five acts," was performed at this time; and La Grange in his *Registre* says: "*Le Tartuffe*, in five acts, was played there [Raincy]." On the other hand, M. Louis Moland (*Vie de J.-B. P. Molière*) quotes a contemporary letter signed by Henry Jules de Bourbon, indicating that the last two acts were still unfinished; M. Moland, however, as well as M. Mesnard, is of the opinion that the five acts were performed at Raincy.

themselves, they attacked this play on the ground of impiety. Louis, on the other hand, though relishing Molière's satire, found it politic not to add fuel to a religious conflagration already raging; so *The Hypocrite* was prohibited, — a most kingly policy, since Napoleon, certainly a less religious monarch than Louis, has been quoted as saying that, had the play been written in his day, he would not have permitted its representation.[1]

Molière had already fought a skirmish with the hypocrites over *The School for Wives;* yet, undaunted by this baptism of fire, he marshalled his forces anew against these most despicable of human beings. To quote the words of his preface:

All the hypocrites have armed themselves against my comedy with appalling fury; yet they have taken care not to attack it on the side which wounds them; for they are too politic for that, and know the world too well to lay bare their souls. Following their praiseworthy habit, they have cloaked their interests with the cause of Heaven; so *The Hypocrite* on their lips becomes a play which offends piety.

This indicates clearly the lines on which the pharisees waged war. In the first petition Molière presented to the King he outlines his own attitude thus:

I believe that I can do nothing better than attack the vices of my time with ridiculous likenesses; and as hypocrisy is, without doubt, one of the most common, the most disagreeable, and the most dangerous of these, I thought, Sire, that I was rendering a not unimportant service to the honest people of your kingdom.

This is the challenge of a knight couched in the language of a courtier. Ever too politic to offend his

[1] *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène.*

sovereign, Molière flattered Louis in the dénouement of *The Hypocrite* by calling him "the mortal enemy of fraud,"[1] and in the three petitions in which he asked permission to present his comedy, addressed him in a tone of frankness, not to say familiarity, showing a conviction that the King at heart approved of his satire on hypocrisy.

There is space only to indicate the chief battles in the war Molière fought for the right to present his play in public. It began when *The Hypocrite* was proscribed, and lasted until the poet emerged triumphant. Three years after his comedy was prohibited, Molière suddenly placed it upon the boards of his theatre (August fifth, 1667), under the title of *The Impostor* (*L'Imposteur*), with Tartuffe's name changed to Panulphe, and his sombre garments of a director of conscience discarded for the brocades and plumes of a courtier. It was the summer season and the King was absent in Flanders; yet Monsieur de Lamoignon, president of the board of police, promptly closed the theatre. Nothing daunted, Molière despatched two of his comedians, La Thorillière and La Grange, to the camp before Lille with a petition to his Majesty in which the poet assured Louis that "if the hypocrites should win, he would no longer dream of writing comedy."

The King sustained the authorities in their action, but gave Molière's emissaries oral assurance that eventually *The Hypocrite* would be played. Meantime the religionists continued the war. Molière's most bitter opponent was Hardouin de Péréfixe, archbishop of Paris, who, according to Brossette, "placed himself at the head of

[1] See page 212.

the devotees." This prelate decided to render the police proscription doubly sure by forbidding the Christians of his diocese "to act *Le Tartuffe* — whatever the name of the said comedy might be — to read it, or hear it read, under pain of excommunication." This interdiction was posted on the door of every church in the diocese of Paris, and, as if this were not sufficient anathema, a Jansenist pamphleteer named Adrien Baillet declared Molière to be "one of the most dangerous enemies the century or the world had aroused against the church," while Bourdaloue, at least a worthy foe, pronounced *The Hypocrite* "one of those damnable inventions intended to humiliate worthy people and render them liable to suspicion." [1]

These attacks told upon Molière's health. During the summer of 1667 he fell ill and his theatre was closed for seven weeks. Finally his indomitable persistence was rewarded. After Clement IX had restored the Jansenist bishops to papal favour, Molière petitioned the King for the third time for permission to play his comedy, and Louis, finding a temporary calm upon the religious sea, restored *The Hypocrite* to the stage by the royal decree of February fifth, 1669.

So great was the curiosity aroused in the public mind by this five years' controversy that the receipts of the theatre reached the phenomenal sum of two thousand eight hundred and sixty livres at the first performance; the crowd about the doors of the Palais Royal becoming so immense that, in the words of a chronicler, "cloaks and sides were both torn," — a striking proof that the enmity of the church is the best advertisement a play can receive.

[1] *Sermon sur l'hypocrisie.*

The Hypocrite was not the sole missile discharged by Molière against the ramparts of hypocrisy. Within a year after it had been interdicted he had placed upon the boards (February fifteenth, 1665) *Don Juan; or, The Feast of Stone* (*Don Juan, ou le festin de pierre*), a five-act comedy in prose founded upon a Spanish play by Tirso de Molina.[1]

The Spanish work told with impressive sombreness the legend of Don Juan Tenorio, a Sevillian rake dragged to everlasting torment by the statue of the man he had murdered after betraying his daughter. Mozart's opera has made this story too familiar to need repetition here. Indeed, it was equally well known when Molière's play appeared; for two Frenchmen, Dorimond and Villiers by name, had each written a version in verse, while in Italy there were at least three Don Juans upon the contemporary stage.[2]

Whether Molière modelled his play after Tirso de Molina or after one of the Spaniard's foreign imitators, is a matter of slight consequence. He wrote it, so the story goes, at the urgent request of his comrades, and most likely the material he used was as international as the legend of Don Juan Tenorio's misdeeds, though the lightness of his touch, at least, is suggestive of the Italian Don Juans rather than Molina's more lugubrious Sevillian. Molière's rake is essentially Gallic; his other characters truly of the soil of France. Indeed, our interest in this comedy lies in its vigorous characterisation.

[1] *El burlador de Sevilla y combidado de piedra.*

[2] George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman*, is the most modern version of this ancient theme.

Though less masterful than its predecessor as literature, it bears equally the hall mark of dramatic genius. To quote M. Louis Moland:

Don Juan tends more and more to fill a higher place in Molière's works. True, it is not written with such incomparable art as *The Misanthrope* or *The Hypocrite* . . . yet Molière's conception is presented with extraordinary boldness; his genius has never shown itself at once so independent and vigorous. . . . This comedy is a world fully set in motion by the impetus of the main idea creating it and giving it life. All classes of society pass in turn before our eyes. The unity lies in the foundation, not in the design. The same breath animates all its characters; the same atmosphere surrounds them; moreover, around them a sublime space prevails. It is quite in Shakespeare's mighty style.[1]

In this passage M. Moland touches the dominant note; for of all Molière's plays *Don Juan* is the most suggestive of Shakespeare. The pernicious unities of time and place, so long a fetich of French dramatists, are cast to the four winds; for the scene shifts from seacoast and forest to interior and tomb with a disregard of Aristotle worthy of the Bard of Avon. Still there is unity of action. Each incident, incongruous as it may at first appear, furthers the story of a rake's progress to perdition. Atmosphere and action furnish the exposition. Complications, catastrophe, and dénouement are subordinated to character painting; yet there is more movement in *Don Juan* than in any of Molière's comedies, — movement of scene, movement of incident, tempered by the author's marvellous gift of characterisation. As M. Moland truly says, "all classes of society pass before

[1] *Vie de J.-B. P. Molière.*

our eyes," — patricians, rakes, paupers, peasants, spadassins, flunkies, tradesmen, and even ghosts are projected upon the scene with the veracity of a vitascope. It is the psychology of society, rich in unerring touches, but society droning a chorus as in a Greek play; for the characters, to whom all else is subordinated, are Don Juan and his servant, Sganarelle. Even the latter is designed as a foil to the impious rake, his master; since Sganarelle's cunning, superstition, and qualms of conscience form part of Molière's dominant idea that "a great lord who is a wicked man is a terrible thing."

A railer and a debauchee, riding rough-shod over mankind with birthright for his steed — a rake, a seducer, a conscienceless murderer, without faith or respect, yet replete with personal charm; a man with every vice, and but the single virtue — courage; in short, this Don Juan is a *grand seigneur* of the old régime, ruthlessly asserting his seigneurial right while starving peasants beat the swamps throughout the night to keep the frogs from croaking. His creed that "two and two make four, and four and four make eight," is the essence of atheism. His admonition to his father to "die as soon as possible as the best thing he can do," is inspired by his egoistic theory that "every one must have his turn," — a doctrine that in the succeeding century found French expression in the apothegm "After me, the deluge."

This libertine's ideas of love are in keeping with his egoism:

Would you have a man bind himself for ever to the first object which has caught his fancy, renounce the world for her sake, and have eyes for no other woman? A fine thing to pique one's self upon, the false honour of being faithful. . . . No, no, constancy is only fit for

fools . . . as for me, beauty delights me wherever I meet it . . . What matters it if I am pledged elsewhere; the love I feel for one fair lady does not persuade my heart to do injustice to others; I have eyes to see the merit of each, and I pay to each the homage and tribute nature demands. . . . Budding desires, after all, have an indescribable charm, and the chief pleasure of love is in variety. . . . Yet when once I am master, there is nothing more to say, nothing more to wish; all the joys of passion are over, and I am lulled to sleep by the tranquillity of such a love. . . . In short, there is nothing so sweet as to triumph over the resistance of a pretty girl. Under such circumstances I am inspired by the ambition of a conqueror, flying perpetually from victory to victory, and unable to set bounds to his longing. Nothing can restrain the impetuosity of my desires; I feel I have a heart capable of loving all the world, and, like Alexander, I could sigh for other worlds wherein to extend my amorous conquests.

This "greatest rascal the earth has ever held," as Sganarelle calls his master, "this madman, dog, devil, Turk, and heretic who believes in neither Heaven, Hell, nor werewolf," stalks brave as a paladin through danger with scorn upon his lip and a hand upon his rapier. "Nothing is capable of inspiring terror in me," he cries in the face of a spectre foreshadowing his doom. "With my sword I shall prove if it be body or ghost." "No, no!" he tells Sganarelle, as the spirit vanishes; "it shall never be said of me, no matter what happens, that I am capable of repenting. Come, follow me!"

Byron, a libertine himself, idealised Don Juan. Molière paints this arch-seducer — symbol of the vices of the old nobility — in remorseless colours, yet pays full homage to patrician bravery. When the statue of the man he has wronged and murdered asks if he has courage

to sup with him, Don Juan accepts without a moment's hesitation; when his sepulchral host demands his hand, he extends it boldly, though it means to clasp the hand of death. As the earth opens to engulf him, no cry of fear escapes his lips. What a portrait of the debonair noble of a century later, mounting the scaffold with a smile upon his vitiated face!

When hell's lightning flashes to extol his master's doom, servile, superstitious, tricky Sganarelle exclaims:

Alas! my wages, my wages! Everyone is satisfied by his death: offended Heaven, violated laws, seduced maidens, dishonoured families, outraged parents, injured wives, husbands driven to despair — all are satisfied. I, alone, am miserable — my wages, my wages, my wages![1]

When there were no more wages, the people, "driven to despair," whom Sganarelle here symbolises, arose to avenge those violated laws! Then the feast of stone became the feast of the guillotine.

There is one false note in this picture of the old régime. Molière's Don Juan becomes a hypocrite in his last hour, because, as he says, "hypocrisy is a fashionable vice, and all fashionable vices pass for virtues." The poet should have left hypocrisy to Tartuffe; it ill becomes patrician Don Juan. A man who boldly acclaims himself incapable of repentance, who faces death with unflinching courage, is not a hypocrite. Aristocrats are

[1] Rochemont, a contemporary, in his *Observations sur une comédie de Molière intitulée le Festin de Pierre*, 1665, mentions Sganarelle's plaint about his lost wages as one of the impious passages of the play; and so does a pamphlet written in response to Rochemont. After the first performance Molière was obliged to alter this speech, although M. Louis Moland and M. Mesnard both point out that it occurred in Cicognini's Italian version and consequently was not original with Molière.

gamblers, rakes, libertines, debauchees, and atheists, if you like, but hypocrisy, thriving upon material gain, is essentially middle class. The hypocrites of France were the parasites of humble origin who used religion as a stepping-stone to power; not the debauched nobles, like Don Juan, fearing neither man nor God. Don Juan, exclaiming that hypocrisy is a "privileged vice," that "a man who is no fool adapts himself to the vices of his age," is Molière preaching *ex cathedra* to his enemies.

This second attack upon hypocrisy reawakened the bitterness aroused by the first. Don Juan's atheism and impenitence were scandalous, Sganarelle's burlesque lamentations a shock to the community's moral sense, cried the religionists; and means were soon found to cut short the life of this play. Only fifteen performances were given. At the second the scandalous lines were suppressed, and after the closing of his theatre for the Easter holidays, Molière found it expedient to reopen with another play, although there had been no diminution in the receipts of *Don Juan* sufficient to warrant its suppression. According to Voltaire, a five-act comedy in prose written without regard to the unities was too unheard of a novelty to please a Parisian audience; but M. Mesnard is far nearer the truth in attributing *Don Juan's* short life to "a silent persecution." "It is clear," he says, "that during the Easter vacation the wisdom of taking his comedy from the boards was pointed out to Molière."[1]

In *The Hypocrite* the iniquities of the lords spiritual were exposed; in *Don Juan* the depravity of the lords temporal was laid bare. Molière could do no better "than attack the vices of his time with ridiculous like-

[1] *Œuvres de Molière.*

nesses," for only when his lance was poised against some evil did he rise to his full height. Had France profited by these lessons from his fearless pen, she might have been spared her Reign of Terror. Molière, the poet militant, is indeed a noble figure, — a Bayard of literature, *sans peur et sans reproche.*

XIII

THEATRICAL AND DOMESTIC LIFE

In more ways than one the theatrical year beginning at Easter, 1664, was the most eventful in Molière's career. In May, at the Versailles fêtes, he reached the climax of mundane glory possible for an actor in an age so prescribed; before the year had ended, both *The Hypocrite* and *Don Juan* had been written, while *The Misanthrope*, the greatest unit in this trilogy of unrivalled brilliance, was conceived, and work upon it begun.

Not only did this year mark the culmination of Molière's genius, but of his happiness as well, for the walls of his fool's paradise crumbled then; ere it had closed, he might well exclaim, like Alceste, his misanthrope: "At court or in town I behold only objects that heat my bile." But before his domestic tragedy is unfolded, a few theatrical happenings must be chronicled, else they may be lost sight of entirely.

In November (1664) La Grange replaced Molière as *orateur* of the troupe, — a functionary with the attributes of the modern "press agent"; yet, there being no daily papers, his effusions upon the merits of forthcoming productions were delivered orally from the stage at the close of each performance. The young actor thus promoted was of all Molière's comedians the most praiseworthy. Playing lovers' parts to perfection, he added a personal note of decency to a profession really too disso-

lute, and, as a writer, not only chronicled the doings of the company, but was his chief's first editor as well. To quote M. Gustave Larroumet, "Molière crowned the dramatic profession with the aureole of genius; La Grange brought to it the soft tones of a fine talent and a fine character." [1]

In November of this same theatrical year Gros René, long Molière's companion in his "barn storming" days, and the husband of the imperious Italian beauty Marquise Thérèse de Gorla du Parc, departed this life; and his comrades were so affected that they closed their theatre at the time of his death, although it was Tuesday, a regular theatrical day. In March, 1664, Brécourt, a quarrelsome actor who will be remembered as the estimable murderer of a Parsian cabman, left Molière's forces to join those of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and was replaced by Hubert,[2] a comedian of the Théâtre du Marais; but the theatrical event of most striking interest is that chronicled by La Thorillière,[3] regarding various eleemosynary payments made during June and July, 1664, to a wounded porter or door-keeper.

In those days of "radiant baldrics" and keen-pointed rapiers the porter of a theatre held a perilous post indeed. It was his duty to collect the admission money, and he was likely to be spitted by the first impecunious

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

[2] See note, page 194.

[3] Two registers kept by La Thorillière, and somewhat similar in purpose to La Grange's famous work, are preserved in the archives of *La Comédie française*. They cover the period from April sixteenth, 1663, to January sixth, 1665, and chronicle the expense account of the troupe. The first of these registers was republished in 1890 by G. Monval in his Moliéresque collection.

swashbuckler to whom he refused admittance; hence the four gifts of from three to eleven livres each to a wounded porter, recorded by La Thorillière. Moreover, during July, 1664, a police guard was required at Molière's theatre for nearly every performance. This may seem an anomaly in the law and order reign of Louis XIV; yet howsoever pacified the noble-born *frondeurs* may have become, the populace was far from tranquil, and street duels were of almost daily occurrence. The retainers of great nobles considered themselves above the law, and the theatre was a favourite haunt for plumed and begirdled rascallions of all degrees.

The King's musketeers, life-guards, *gendarmes*, and light horse were "dead heads," and the troopers of these favoured corps filled the *parterre* in such boisterous numbers, according to Grimarest, that Molière obtained a revocation of this privilege from the sovereign; whereupon the irate soldiery forced the theatre doors and "by dint of sword" sought to avenge the loss of their prerogatives. The porter fell, pierced by "a hundred thrusts," and his assailants were about to wreak vengeance upon the actors themselves when Louis Béjart, made up as an octogenarian for the play in hand, begged them at least to "spare an old man of seventy-five who had but a few days to live." Béjart demonstrated his right to the sobriquet of *L'Éguisé* (the sharp), for his presence of mind turned the ire of these spadassins to laughter, whereupon Molière, taking the stage, lectured them upon their behaviour until they sheepishly withdrew; but so great had been the tumult that a veritable panic ensued among the members of the company. Hubert and his wife dug a hole in the wall of the Palais Royal; and the husband, with manlike trepidity, forced

his way in first; but the exit being only big enough for his head and shoulders, he became wedged therein, and raved like a madman until the riot subsided and he was rescued from his precarious position.

After this experience Molière's actors were willing enough to renew the "dead head privileges" of the soldiery; but the manager opposed any concession, and his adroitness in assuring the guards sent to protect the theatre that he had sought only to exclude a few scoundrels who were masquerading as musketeers, seconded, no doubt, by royal command, so mollified the wearers of the King's livery that further outbreak on their part was avoided.

On another occasion a theatre porter named Germain was attacked by five retainers of a nobleman's household, and rescued only after one of the offenders had been killed and another wounded by two pistol shots fired by an unknown hand. Once when Molière was playing in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, he became a target for stones and "the stub of an old pipe," while at the end of the play a nobleman's page augmented the disturbance by beating a young man in the audience on the head with a bludgeon. A king's counsellor, seated on the stage, sought to calm the rioters by calling upon them to remember that they were in the presence of one of their judges; whereupon "a young man in a black velvet doublet with a sword at his side and a white plumed hat upon his head," raised his voice and cried disdainfully, "We defy our judges! We have no judges!" — a manifesto so popular that the counsellor was glad to escape with his life. At a performance of *Psyche* given a few weeks before Molière's death, some fifty or sixty rowdies stopped the play, and when La

Thorillière, addressing the audience at the instigation of another king's counsellor, offered to return the disturbers their money or lower the curtain, they replied that they did not care a hang for their money, but only wished to be amused, upon which assurance the play proceeded.[1]

Filling the triple rôle of author, manager, and comedian amid such turbulent surroundings, Molière presents, indeed, an heroic figure, especially when it is remembered that besides fighting hypocrites, quelling riots in his theatre, settling the squabbles of his players, and acting four times a week, he wrote an average of two comedies a year, in which he was called upon to provide satisfactory rôles for four actresses with almost equally tenable claims to the centre of the stage, the most capricious of whom was his own wife.

The evidence of *The School for Wives*, *The Versailles Impromptu*, and *The Forced Marriage* all tends to prove that Molière's eyes were early opened to the shortcomings of Armande Béjart; yet until the time of the fêtes known as "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle," this ill assorted couple dwelt together in apparent concord. At Versailles, however, Armande Béjart became the theatrical centre of a very theatric occasion. She rode upon Apollo's chariot as the Age of Gold, played Diana to Molière's Pan, and as one of Alcina's nymphs floated about the Basin of Apollo on a wooden sea monster; while, to crown her triumphs, she appeared upon a verdant stage as the Princess of Elis. Her power to charm the beholder in this rôle can be no better told than in the words of Euryale, the enraptured prince of the play:

[1] *Documents inédits sur J.-B. Poquelin Molière* by Émile Campardon.

She is, in truth, adorable at all times; but at that moment more so than ever, and new charms redoubled the splendour of her beauty. Never was her face adorned with more lovely colours; never were her eyes armed with swifter or more piercing arrows. The softness of her voice persisted in showing itself in the perfectly charming air which she deigned to sing; and the marvellous tones she uttered pierced the very depth of my soul and held all my senses in a rapture from which they were unable to escape. She next showed a disposition altogether divine; her lovable feet on the enamel of the soft turf traced delightful steps, which carried me quite beyond myself and bound me by irresistible bonds to the graceful and accurate movements with which her whole body followed those harmonious motions.

Armande Béjart had in her soul the passion and the instinct of the theatre. Sooner or later, she would have given a husband of Molière's temperament real or imaginative cause for jealousy. To the great majority of Molière's biographers she is a grossly unfaithful wife, singularly ungrateful for the kindness and affection of the man whose great name she bore; yet when the evidence against her is examined minutely, the only fact clearly established is that she and Molière separated after a few years of married life. Whether this marital disagreement was caused by actual misconduct on her part during the Versailles fêtes, or merely by the imprudent flirtations in which she apparently indulged, is exceedingly difficult to determine. Indeed, the most tangible evidence against her is that of Molière's own plays.

If it be admitted that on many occasions the poet wrote subjectively, then his heroines become more or less faithful portraits of his wife as she appeared to him at

various moments of his life; his heroes, not himself certainly, but the embodiment of his overburdened heart. A critic whose own work has been purely technical or objective will be likely to scoff at the personal equation in Molière's comedies; but an imaginative writer knows how, consciously or unconsciously, both characters and opinions are tempered by an author's own experience in life. Molière, a man of forty, married a giddy girl of twenty; and thereafter the theme of a middle aged man's love for a young and frivolous woman recurs in his plays with such singular frequency that to deny subjectiveness to his work is to deny the man a heart capable of voicing its own misery.

The reader has seen how Ariste's generous views of women, as expressed in *The School for Husbands* shortly before Molière's own marriage, differed from those voiced in *The School for Wives*, a few months thereafter, by the pathetic, unrequited love of Arnolphe, a man who had learned

> — the artful tricks, the subtle plots
> Which women use to leave us in the lurch,
> And how they dupe us by their cleverness.

It has been urged, probably by bachelors, that, when *The School for Wives* was written, Molière had not been married sufficiently long to have discovered his wife's real character; yet many a man besides him has been disillusioned ere the honeymoon has waned.

In *The Forced Marriage*, presented but a few months before Armande Béjart played so prominent a part at Versailles, Dorimène, the flighty young heroine, tells Sganarelle, her bourgeois fiancé, that after marriage she means to give herself over to pleasure, and make up for the time she has lost. "As you are a well bred man,"

she says, "and know the world, I think we shall get on together famously, and that you will not be one of those bothering husbands who expect their wives to live like bugbears. I confess that would not suit me. Solitude drives me mad. I like gambling, visiting, assemblies, entertainments, promenades, in fact, all kinds of pleasure; and you should be overjoyed to have a wife with my tastes."

Giving birth to her first child, Louis, for whom the King stood sponsor, only ten days before this play was produced, Armande Béjart was unable to speak these lines; yet who will deny the aptness of their reference to herself? The reader will recall how faithfully Molière painted her portrait in *The Burgher, a Gentleman;*[1] while in *George Dandin* the heroine complains of the tyranny of husbands "who wish their wives to be dead to all amusements and to live only for them." Furthermore, in *The Misanthrope*, — a comedy to be considered at length in the ensuing chapter, — the similarity between fact and fiction is even more striking.

That Armande Béjart, instead of being actually vicious, was merely a vain and incorrigible flirt, is the view Grimarest takes of her character in the following paragraph:

No sooner was she Mlle. de Molière than she believed she ranked with a duchess; and scarcely had she appeared upon the stage ere the idle courtier made her the topic of his tales. . . . Molière imagined that the entire court and all the town had designs upon his wife, and she did not take the trouble to disabuse his mind of this idea. On the contrary, her scrupulous care in dress, designed, as he supposed, for every one but himself, and

[1] See page 151.

a proceeding he did not care for, only increased his suspicion and jealousy. He tried to point out the way she must behave if their domestic happiness was to be assured, but his teaching seemed to her too severe for a young person who, besides, had nothing with which to reproach herself; so she failed to profit thereby.

Molière suffered much from the heartlessness of his wife, but that he believed her guilty of transgressing the decalogue is still unproved. Had it not been for the anonymous author of *The Famous Comédienne*, it is probable, to quote Mr. H. Noel Williams, "that Armande's name would have gone down to posterity without any very serious stain upon it."[1]

The first lover imputed to her is the Abbé de Richelieu, a grand-nephew of the noted cardinal, and a libertine with a marked partiality for actresses. To quote *The Famous Comédienne*:[2]

He was very liberal, and, the young woman being fond of expenditure, the matter was quickly arranged between them. In order that her engagement to him might be manifested in the finest style, it was agreed that he should give her four pistoles a day, exclusive of clothes and entertainments. The abbé did not fail to send each morning, by a page, the pledge of their compact or to visit her every afternoon.

[1] *Queens of the French Stage.*

[2] The authorship of this scurrilous pamphlet has been attributed, successively, to Racine, La Fontaine, Chapelle, Blot, a balladist of the Fronde, and Rasimont, an actor, without any apparent rhyme or reason; likewise to Mlle. Guyot, a member of Armande Béjart's company after Molière's death, and to Mlle. Boudin, a provincial actress. M. Gustave Larroumet believes that because of the preponderating place it allots to women and the manner in which it speaks of men, the author was one of Armande's professional rivals. The present writer fully concurs in this opinion.

Armande Béjart bore Molière a son on January nineteenth, 1664, and the Abbé de Richelieu left France in March of that same year to war against the Turks in Hungary, and died at Venice, on January ninth, 1665; so it is apparent that any intrigue between this churchman and Molière's wife must have taken place before the lady's honeymoon was fully eclipsed. To conceive of the abbé's page knocking at the bridal chamber each morning with his master's pistoles requires too fanciful a flight of the imagination for the modern mind to compass; yet our anonymous vilifier thus proceeds to detail another adventure quite as improbable:

The abbé's affair lasted several months without disruption; but Molière having written *The Princess of Elis*, in which La Molière played the princess, she created such a sensation that her husband had cause to repent of having exhibited her in the region of gilded youth. Scarcely had she arrived at Chambord, where the King gave this entertainment, than she became infatuated with the Comte de Guiche, while the Comte de Lauzun fell madly in love with her. The latter spared no effort to please her, but La Molière, having lost her head over her hero, would listen to no proposition, and contented herself with visiting Du Parc to weep over the indifference of the Comte de Guiche. The Comte de Lauzun, however, did not abandon hope of triumphing, experience having taught him that he was irresistible. Furthermore, he knew that the Comte de Guiche was one who set small store by woman's love, for which reason he doubted not his indifference would end in the repulse of La Molière, and that his own star would then produce in her heart what it had produced in the hearts of all the women he had essayed to please. He was not deceived; for La Molière, angered by the coldness of the Comte de Guiche, threw herself into the arms of the Comte de Lauzun as

if desirous of seeking protection against further suffering at the hands of a man who failed to appreciate her.

At the time of the Versailles fêtes the Comte de Guiche was in exile at Warsaw; but he returned during the summer and was at Fontainebleau when Molière's company played there in August. However, he was falling passionately in love with the Duchesse d'Orléans at the time, while the Comte de Lauzun, whose presence at the Versailles fêtes, although unrecorded, is possible, presents a similar amorous alibi, for his affections were then engaged by the Princess of Monaco. Still, it would be easy to believe that the notoriously expansive hearts of both these gentlemen had beaten for a pretty actress as well, were it not that the Abbé de Richelieu, then engaged in cutting the Turk's head (in reality, not *à l'allemande*), is made by the author of *The Famous Comédienne* to play the abhorrent rôle of a resentful sneak who, intercepting a tender letter written by Armande to De Guiche, calls Molière's attention to the fact that "the great care he took to please the public left him no time for examining the conduct of his own wife."

When the abbé had furnished this meat for Molière's jealousy to feed upon, a bitter matrimonial quarrel followed, according to this anonymous author. Shedding repentant tears, Armande confessed her love for De Guiche, but said nothing about Lauzun; then, protesting that her guilt was only in intention, she obtained Molière's forgiveness "merely to continue her intrigues with more éclat than ever."

Tiring of unrequited sentiments, such as her love for De Guiche, she resolved to make profit of her charms,

the writer goes on to say; but in due course of time Molière learned anew of her misconduct and forthwith threatened to confine her in a convent. Armande wept and swooned, but instead of entreating pardon, as before, turned the tables upon her husband by charging him with undue intimacy with his former flame, Mlle. de Brie. Conceiving henceforth "a terrible aversion" for her husband, she treated him with the greatest contempt, until matters reached such extremities that Molière, "beginning to realise her wicked propensities," consented to the separation she demanded; so, "without a parliamentary decree, they agreed to live together no longer."

Finally the author of *The Famous Comédienne* stands upon tenable ground; for although the three lovers are apparently chosen at hazard, the separation here recounted undoubtedly took place. As for the part played by Mlle. de Brie in bringing this to pass, this same scandalmonger asserts that she lived in Molière's house. If this were the case, any one familiar with theatrical life will readily perceive that she must have proved a warring element; yet the modern writers who assert the truth of the contention that "Mlle. de Brie lived in the Molière house and had not left it since the marriage," have drawn their information, to quote M. Mesnard, "from no source we are aware of besides *The Famous Comédienne*."[1]

It is difficult to follow with certainty the various changes of residence made by Molière; but the most likely theory is that at the time of his marriage he was living in his father's house, where he remained until he moved to the rue St. Thomas du Louvre to occupy

[1] *Œuvres de Molière.*

lodgings in a building owned by one Milet, *maréchal des camps et armées du Roi.* The first record of his residence in the latter establishment is found in the burial permit for his first child, dated November eleventh, 1664. M. Milet likewise rented apartments to Madeleine, Geneviève, and Louis Béjart; so, again to quote M. Mesnard, "it would not be surprising to find Mlle. de Brie in the house in the rue St. Thomas du Louvre, since it was customary for the actors of the same troupe to lodge near each other." It was certainly an unwise move on Molière's part to take his young wife to live with her brother and sisters; and if Mlle. de Brie and other theatrical ladies dwelt under the same roof, the domestic tranquillity he sought was impossible of attainment.

Another disturbing element was introduced into his household by Molière himself in the person of Michel Baron, a child comedian he rescued from a strolling company. Both the mother and the father of this boy had acted at the Hôtel de Bourgogne with considerable success; and, being left an orphan at an early age, he was apprenticed by an aunt and uncle to a troupe of child actors managed by a woman named Raisin. Having squandered in the provinces the profits of her venture upon a gentleman attached to the Prince of Monaco's suite, this woman came to Paris in 1664 to recoup her fortunes, where, appealing to Molière's charitable heart, she obtained the use of his theatre for three performances. Young Baron's acting on this occasion made such an impression on the great man that he took the lad to his house to sleep, and had him sumptuously dressed in new clothes. Grimarest, whose materials for his biography were obtained from Baron himself, may here be allowed to speak *ex cathedra:*

Molière asked the lad what he most wished for at that moment. "To be with you for the rest of my days," Baron replied, "in order to show my sincere gratitude for all your kindness to me." "Very well," said Molière, "the thing is done; for the King has given me permission to take you out of the troupe you are in."

Mme. Raisin naturally objected to being forcibly deprived of her star performer; but there was no gainsaying the King's will, so young Baron was transferred to Molière's care, henceforth to be treated as a son. The poet's interest in the lad was justified, for he became, in later years, the greatest actor of his day, as well as a successful dramatist; but Molière's fondness was not shared by his wife, nor did Baron's own conduct fully justify his benefactor's interest. It appears that Armande hated the lad for his impertinence and precocity, and still more for the influence she believed he exercised over her husband.

To display the talents of his protégé at court, Molière began the writing of *Mélicerte*, a play he was pleased to term *An Heroic Pastoral*. This comedy was intended for production at a fête known as "The Ballet of the Muses," held at St. Germain in December, 1666. Baron was cast for the title rôle; but one day, at rehearsal, Armande Béjart's resentment and jealousy rose to such a point that she dealt the lad a sound box on the ear. So indignant was he that he took himself off forthwith to join his former manageress, leaving Molière with an unfinished play and no one for the leading part.

As Baron was then a handsome lad in his teens, "already in great request among the ladies of the theatre and also among certain ladies of the fashionable world," Armande's resentment was possibly caused by his indif-

ference to her. Molière should have been thankful to be rid of the young scamp; but such was not the case, since Baron returned to the Palais Royal several years later, at its manager's earnest solicitation.

Although the date of Molière's rupture with his wife is uncertain, manifestly it took place shortly after the Baron episode, since early in the following year (1667) the poet became so ill from overwork and domestic worry that he lived upon a milk diet for two months, and retired to an apartment in a large country house at Auteuil which he had rented from one Jacques de Grou. There he dwelt until he became reconciled to his wife, some four years later.[1]

The milk diet suggests alimentary ills and a disordered nervous system. Indeed, there is considerable reason for believing that although Molière died of a lung trouble, he was long a sufferer from neurasthenia, a malady so often the result of excessive mental work. His irritability, moroseness, excessive tenderness, violent jealousy, and the strong introspective tendency displayed in his plays, all suggest that complaint; and indeed there are few brain workers who have not, at some time and in some degree, suffered the torments of that intangible disease.

Some have maintained that Molière's disposition was the cause of his wife's misconduct, — a criticism not without reason; for once a husband has "got on a wife's nerves," to use a colloquial expression, the latter, if she be at all flighty by nature, will be likely to seek diversion everywhere save at home. In this connection M. Mesnard's remarks seem most pertinent:

[1] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière* by Jules Loiseleur.

It has been said that Molière's restless character and jealous transports irritated his wife's nature to such a degree that she sought vengeance for this tiresome want of confidence in flirtatious bravado. This apology for Mme. Molière is at best excessive, since to strike an even balance for this couple appears to us an injustice. However, we shall oppose no difficulty in the way of recognising the discord of their characters, or certain of Molière's traits likely to appal a frivolous young wife. Doubtless the great man appeared to her too much of a philosopher and dreamer, often too melancholy, and, when borne down by the weight of his incessant work, more harassed than she would have wished for her pleasure and comfort; while he felt the need of a tranquil home and a tenderness equal to his own. The inborn jealousy which in his stage life passed for mere oddity made him appear to this Béjart an importunate, troublesome husband. She might well exclaim, like Célimène in *The Misanthrope:* "There are a hundred moments when I find him the greatest bore in the world." Still was he not easily enraged, and had he not offensive manners and impatient impulses? One might perhaps cite, in proof of this, the anecdote told by Grimarest about his anger against a valet who twice put on one of his stockings wrong side out, but this proof is very meagre. One moment of passion does not convey the right to regard as unmerited Molière's reputation for much gentleness and unrestrained kindness toward those who served him.[1]

In his contention that Molière's faults were not insupportable, M. Mesnard submits the evidence of Mlle. Poisson, daughter of the poet's old comrade, Du Croisy, to the effect that he was "kind, obliging, and generous." Now, it is often the case that persons the most irritable at home show, in the presence of strangers, the very

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière.*

qualities Mlle. Poisson cites. If the so-called artistic temperament be analysed, it will be found to be little else than a nervous disease; for the very transports an artist experiences when in the throes of creation are offset by restless fits of depression at his inability to interpret his conceptions satisfactorily, or intense outbursts of passion toward unappreciating critics, all of which bespeaks an unequable nature and disordered nerves. Tranquillity of mind is a characteristic of mediocre people, but not of great artists such as Molière. Remember, he was twenty years his wife's senior, and, despite his brilliance, generosity, and kindness, it is easy to imagine he was not easy to relish as a daily conjugal diet. Such a psychological view of this couple's incompatibility makes Molière's wretchedness of heart no less intense, nor his wife less culpable for her failure to love, honour, and obey a man so manifestly her superior in both ability and moral worth. It merely makes clear the impossibility of such an ill mated pair ever living together in peace and comfort.

Physiognomy, too, may be cited as evidence of this couple's incongruity. For instance, Loret calls Armande Béjart "the actress with the pretty face"; while Robinet, another rhymester of the period, says "nothing could be so beautiful or dainty as she." Her lord and master, however, judging by the following word portrait painted by Du Croisy's daughter,[1] could scarcely be dubbed a handsome man:

Molière was neither too fat nor too thin. He was tall rather than short, his bearing was noble, his leg well turned. He walked sedately, his manner was serious, his nose important, his mouth large, his lips thick, his

[1] See note, page 81.

complexion dark, his eyebrows black and bushy, while the various twitches he gave them made his expression extremely comical. [1]

After the rupture with his wife, Molière, to quote Grimarest,[2] "did his utmost to confine himself to his works and to his friends without grieving over his wife's conduct." In his retreat at Auteuil "he lived as a true philosopher," where, "engaged in pleasing his Prince with his works and in acquiring an honest reputation, he bothered little about the caprices of his wife, whom he allowed to live according to her fancy, although he retained for her a veritable affection."

This tenderness is further attested by Molière's first biographer in an account of a conversation between the poet and his friend Jacques Rohault, a noted Cartesian philosopher. "Yes, my dear Rohault," Molière is quoted as saying, "I am the most wretched of men, yet I deserve my fate. Not seeing I was too austere for a

[1] During the summer and autumn of 1905 a prolonged discussion occurred in the French press regarding the moustache made so familiar by the existing portraits of Molière. In one of these he is presented with a smooth face; yet it seems most likely that he wore a slight moustache, which on the stage was extended by means of charcoal in accordance with the fashion set by Scaramouche. This is the opinion expressed by M. Georges Monval, the venerable archivist of the Comédie Française and for ten years editor of the *Molièriste;* yet a writer in the *Westminster Gazette* may be quoted, in this connection, with a certain amount of pertinency. "The amusing part of this controversy," he says, "is that none of those who engaged in it seem to have hit upon the idea that Molière, like minor mortals, might have worn a moustache at one period of his life and lived without it at another."

[2] For events occurring after the advent of Baron as a factor in Molière's life, Grimarest, who learned his facts from this actor's lips, seems, to the present writer, a far more trustworthy authority than for happenings previous to the time when Baron joined the forces of the Palais Royal.

domestic life, I felt my wife should subject her behaviour to her virtue and my wishes; yet, had she done so, I fully realise that she would have been far more miserable than I. She is sprightly and witty, and keen for the pleasure of making herself appreciated; yet, in spite of myself, this makes me gloomy." Again, in the same imaginary conversation, Molière is made to say that "a hundred times more reasonable than he, his wife wants to enjoy life; so, confident in her innocence, she goes her own way, disdaining to subject herself to the precautions I demand." Surely this does not savour of a belief in her misbehaviour! Moreover, Molière, still speaking with Grimarest as his mouthpiece, exclaims that his wife, above suspicion on the part of any one less disturbed than he, "unmercifully leaves him to suffer" and "laughs at his weakness."

Whether innocent or not of actual misconduct, Armande Béjart's frivolity was ill contrived to bring peace and happiness to the heart of such a man as Molière. To quote Shakespeare's immortal tragedy of jealousy,

> "But, O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!"

In *The Famous Comédienne* there is an oft quoted scene, which, while raising that contemptible screed to the dignity of literature, paints the "damnèd minutes" Molière underwent so vividly that one is loath to believe it the work of a traducer. Here, in another imaginary conversation, Molière again unburdens his heart. The friend on this occasion is Chapelle, the epicurean comrade of his youth; and so touching are the poet's words, so replete with true sentiment and feeling, that some have believed them to be taken from an actual letter written to his friend by the poet himself.

The scene is Molière's garden at Auteuil; the topic, his unhappiness; for Chapelle, seeing his friend is more disturbed than is his wont, rallies him upon his weakness, and maintains that nothing is more ridiculous than to love any one who will not respond to his affection.

"'For my part,' says he, 'if I were unfortunate enough to find myself in like state, and be convinced that the person I loved granted favours to others, I should feel a contempt for her such as would certainly cure me of my passion. Moreover, a reparation is open to you which would be denied if she were only your mistress. The vengeance which commonly takes the place of love in an outraged heart can compensate you for all the vexations your wife causes you, since you can at once shut her up in a convent, — a method sure to set your mind at rest.'

"Molière, who had listened quietly to his friend, here interrupted him to inquire whether he had ever been in love.

"'Yes,' replied Chapelle, 'as much as a man of good sense ought to be, but I should never make mountains out of anything that my honour counselled me to do, and I blush to find you so undecided.'

"'I see clearly,' rejoined Molière, 'that you have never really loved. You take love's semblance for love itself. Although I might give you infinite examples to demonstrate the power of that passion, I shall merely give you a faithful account of my own troubles, so that you may understand how little we are masters of ourselves when once love's dominion is assured. As for the consummate knowledge of the human heart you say the portraits I am constantly presenting to the public prove me to possess, I acknowledge that I have en-

deavoured to understand its weaknesses; but if science teaches me that danger should be avoided, experience convinces me only too thoroughly that escape is impossible. I judge this daily from myself. My disposition is by nature extremely affectionate, and all my efforts have never enabled me to overcome an inclination toward love; hence I sought to make myself happy, — that is to say, as happy as a man with a sensitive heart may be, — and, convinced that few women are deserving of sincere affection, that interest, ambition, and vanity are at the root of all their intrigues, I endeavoured to insure my happiness by the innocence of my choice. I took my wife, so to speak, from the cradle, and educated her with the care which has given rise to rumours which have doubtless reached your ears. I persuaded myself that I could inspire her with the habit of sentiments time alone could destroy, so I neglected nothing to attain this end. As she was still young when I married her, I perceived none of her evil propensities, and deemed myself a little less unfortunate than the majority of those who contract similar engagements. Neither did my eagerness diminish after marriage; yet I found so much indifference in her that I began to perceive all my precautions had been useless, and that the feelings she had for me were far indeed from those my happiness demanded. Reproaching myself with a sensitiveness which seemed ridiculous in a husband, I ascribed to her disposition that which was really due to her want of affection for me; yet I had but too many opportunities of perceiving my error, for the mad passion she contracted soon afterward for the Comte de Guiche occasioned too much commotion to leave me even this appearance of tranquillity. So soon as I knew the truth, finding it impossible to change her, I spared

no endeavour to conquer myself. Employing all the strength of mind I could command, I summoned to my aid everything that might console me. Deeming her a person whose sole merit had lain in her innocence, and whose infidelity robbed her of all charm, I resolved henceforth to live with her as an honourable man whose wife is a coquette, and who is well persuaded that, whatever may be said, his reputation is not affected by the misconduct of his spouse. But I had the mortification to discover that a woman without great beauty, who owed what little intelligence she possessed to the education I had given her could in one instant destroy all my philosophy. Her presence made me forget all my resolutions; the first words she said in her defence left me so convinced that my suspicions were ill founded that I asked her pardon for having been so credulous.

"'However, my kindness wrought no change in her, and in the end I determined to live with her as if she were not my wife; but if you knew what I suffer, you would pity me. My passion has reached such a point as to cause me to sympathise with her; and when I realise how impossible it is for me to conquer my feelings for her, I then tell myself that she has, perhaps, a like difficulty in overcoming her love of coquetry; so I find myself more disposed to pity than to blame.

"'No doubt you will tell me one must be a poet to love thus; yet, for my part, I hold that there is only one kind of love, and that those who have not experienced such tenderness have never truly loved. In my heart, all things of this world are associated with her; and so entirely are my thoughts given over to her that when she is away nothing gives me pleasure. When I behold her, transports of emotion which can be felt but not described,

deprive me of all power of reason, and no longer having eyes for her faults, I see only her lovable qualities. Is not this the last extremity of folly, and do you not marvel that all my reason serves only to make me aware of my weakness without giving me the strength to master it?'"

As a touching contribution to the literature of the human heart, this scene is worthy of a laurel crown; yet its author was the most vile and cowardly of all Molière's traducers. The facts regarding the three lovers attributed to Armande Béjart are manifestly wrong; therefore undue credence should not be given to the charges of infidelity brought against either Molière or his wife. True, the morality of theatrical people in an age of license is not an easy cause to defend; yet in judging Molière it should be borne in mind that he lay particularly open to the attacks of jealous rivals.

In his plays he evinces far more delicacy in situation and choice of language than Shakespeare in his; while for the most part their tone is so moral, their point of view so commendable, that to accept the unrefuted charges of a cowardly slanderer regarding the author's character is to impute to him both hypocrisy and baseness, — a thing scarcely believable in the author of *The Hypocrite* and *The Misanthrope*. Indeed, when judged by his comedies, Molière stands forth a valiant defender of virtue in a dissolute reign, a sane philosopher in an age of cant.

Anchorites do not dwell in theatres, it is true, yet there is not a particle of documentary evidence extant to prove that his relations with Mlle. de Brie were more than those of an old and sympathetic companion, or that Armande Béjart was other than a vain, heartless, flighty coquette such as her husband painted in Célimène, the heroine of *The Misanthrope*, the play now to be considered.

XIV

THE MISANTHROPE

In the midst of his domestic troubles Molière wrote *Love as a Doctor* (*L'Amour médecin*), — a piece of buoyant mirth, contrasting strangely with the heaviness of his heart. In this comedy Sganarelle, no longer Don Juan's cringing servant, reappears in his more familiar guise of a well fed and well-to-do bourgeois, vain, narrow minded, superstitious, yet honest withal; in other words, an epitome of the law and order backbone of the French body politic.

This three-act farce in prose is a pleasing trifle, "far better comedy," as Voltaire truly says, "than *The Forced Marriage*," though, like it, written to divert the young monarch. To quote Molière's preface: "It is but a simple pencil sketch, a little impromptu, which the King wished to amuse him, — the most precipitate, however, of all his Majesty has commanded of me; for when I say it was suggested, written, learned, and produced within five days, I shall tell only the truth." With ballet interludes danced to Lully's measures, *Love as a Doctor* was first performed at Versailles, probably on September fourteenth, 1665.[1] Possibly the King took part himself as one of the *Joys*, *Laughters*, or *Pleasures*.

[1] La Grange and Vinot in the edition of 1682 give September fifteenth as the date of production. MM. Monval and Mesnard both incline to September fourteenth as the probable date. The latter (*Œuvres de Molière*) discusses this point at length.

The plot is simple yet diverting. Sganarelle's daughter falling ill, five physicians called in consultation fail to diagnose her mysterious malady as love; whereupon Clitandre, her lover, disguised in medical robes, prescribes matrimony, and induces Sganarelle to sign the contract by telling him that his daughter is temporarily demented, and that the document is but a prescription to humour her.

A play written and produced in five days should be judged as dramaturgy rather than as literature; for, as Molière himself says, "comedies are written only to be played." From this point of view *Love as a Doctor* is certainly praiseworthy, for it moves consistently and rapidly to an amusing climax, and is replete in clever characterisation; still, its chief interest lies not in its smart intrigue, nor in the likelihood that certain scenes were inspired by Tirso de Molina and Cyrano de Bergerac. Above all else, it is distinguished as being Molière's declaration of war against medical empiricism, — a contest which will form the topic of the ensuing chapter. Although its mirth was sprightly and gay, Sganarelle's opening speech touches the note of melancholy which found symphonic expression in *The Misanthrope:*

Ah, what a strange thing life is! and well may I say with a great philosopher of antiquity that he who has land has war; for misfortunes never come singly! I had but one wife and she is dead.

When next Molière's pen touched paper, he painted the portrait of a wife who was dead to him, and sang the misery of his own soul in a way so masterful that *The Misanthrope* stands unrivalled as the greatest of French comedies; for even *The Hypocrite*, superior from a purely

theatric point of view, must give place to its marvellous character analysis, its profound philosophy of life. To tell the anguish of a wounded soul betrayed by heartlessness and falsehood into that most fatal of passions, the hatred of mankind, language has no stronger term than the one Molière chose to typify his greatest comedy. The very word "misanthrope" conjures to the mind a dismal picture of outraged sentiment and embittered confidence.

In Molière's hero a loss of faith in mankind as a whole has followed a loss of faith in the woman he adores; for Alceste's misanthropy is, after all, only a splenetic fancy that all men are deceitful because his mistress is so, — a lover's misogyny, in other words, if this be not a contradiction of terms.

Célimène, the unworthy object of Alceste's affections, is, perhaps, the most perfect picture of feminine coquetry in the realm of literature. Vain, flighty, intoxicated by love of admiration and tainted by the scented air of drawing-rooms, she is best described by the modern word "flirt," — a term aptly derived from a Bavarian expression meaning "to flutter." Her character can be no better painted than in the words of Gustave Larroumet:[1]

Célimène is twenty years of age, and her experience is that of a woman of forty. Coquettish and feline with Alceste, frivolous and backbiting with the little marquesses, cruelly ironical with Arsinoé, in each act, in each scene, she shows herself under a different aspect. A contemporary, or one nearly so, of Mesdames de Châtillon, de Luynes, de Monaco, de Soubise, and the nieces of Mazarin, she ought to awaken, as a vague memory, these great names; she is the exquisite and rare

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

product of an aristocratic civilisation in the full splendour of its development, and often she speaks a language of almost plebeian candour and freshness.

Besides the hero and this frivolous young heroine, the chief characters in the play are Alceste's friend, Philinte, a social opportunist; Éliante, a sensible emblem of womanly worth; Arsinoé, a mischief-making prude, who in English would be denominated Mrs. Grundy; Oronte, a dilettante poet, and Acaste and Clitandre, two court dandies of emasculated wit, about whom the reader might well exclaim, as did the character in *The Versailles Impromptu*, "What, marquesses again!"

The play is in the conventional five acts, the scene being Célimène's drawing-room. The first is devoted entirely to the elucidation of Alceste's character, and the development of the single dramatic fact that he is in love with Célimène, the absolute opposite of his lofty ideals. An Alexandre Dumas *fils* or a Sardou would "blue pencil" this to about six speeches; yet Henri Becque, from whom the best French dramatists of to-day, such as Paul Hervieu and Maurice Donnay, receive their inspiration, derived his technic from profound studies of Molière's character comedy.

Complications, catastrophe, and dénouement should be subordinate to atmosphere and character drawing; the analysis of events must give place to the analysis of persons, these modern Frenchmen maintain — likewise Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Sudermann, and Echegaray. These are not new principles, however; Molière taught them three centuries ago. Indeed, the closer a writer of plays studies the great Frenchman, the less likely is he to fall into the purely theatric rut of situa-

tion, as distinguished from the loftier dramatic ideals of atmosphere and characterisation.

"Leave me, I tell you, and get out of my sight!" Molière's hater of mankind exclaims in the discursive opening scene with his rational friend Philinte. His anger is righteous indignation toward a man who, he says, "ought to die from very shame for almost stifling with caresses, protestations, and vows of friendship one whose name he can scarcely remember." Philinte's defence is that "when a man embraces you warmly, you must repay him in his own coin," — a worldly doctrine that calls forth the following outburst from the enraged Alceste:

> Nay, I cannot suffer such coward ways
> As nearly all your worldly men affect;
> Nor hate I aught so much as the contortions
> Which great asseverators use — those far
> Too cordial givers of unmeaning love,
> Too courteous utterers of empty words,
> Who in smooth manners vie, treating true worth
> And any fopling with an equal grace.
> To what good end if, swearing admiration,
> Tenderness and trust, friendship, zeal, and faith,
> A man shall laud you to the skies, then rush
> Into the arms of any common wretch
> He meets by chance, to do as much? No, no!
> A heart endowed with self-respect can ne'er
> Endure such prostituted reverence;
> The vainest, even, finds but little cheer
> In mere confusion with the universe.
> Esteem on some true preference is based;
> Thus in esteeming all, no man's esteemed.
> Since to the vices of the day you 're pledged,
> You are, in Heaven's name, not of my clan.
> An indiscriminating heart's regard
> I scorn — myself must needs be prized; in brief,
> The friend of all mankind 's no man for me.

Thus Alceste is painted in a few bitter strokes, — a blunt despiser of untruth seeking to rectify the vices of the world by the force of his own word and example: the type of man who in England writes to the *Times*, and in America presides at reform meetings; a man at once too virtuous to accept the *laisser faire* tenets of his practical friend Philinte, and too self-sufficient to forgive mankind for its failure to accept his honest views.

"The world will not alter for all your meddling," Philinte tells this reformer; "all these invectives against the manners of the age make you a laughing stock!" "So much the better," Alceste replies; "all men are so odious to me that I should be sorry to appear rational in their eyes." "Shall all poor mortals, without exception, be included in this aversion?" Philinte asks. Alceste's answer sets forth his misanthropy:

> No, my distaste is catholic; I hate
> All men: malevolence and wickedness
> In some; the rest for paltering with these,
> Lacking the lusty hate vice should inspire
> In every upright heart. . . . Upon my faith,
> It wounds me mortally to see how vice
> Is spared; unto a silent desert, far
> From man's approach, I 'm tempted oft to flee.

In an untranslated portion of this speech the personal equation of Alceste's hatred for society is made apparent. "You see how unjustly and excessively complacent people are to that barefaced scoundrel with whom I am at law," he exclaims. In other words, having been outwitted by "a low bred fellow who deserves to be pilloried," Alceste has a personal grievance against the world. After all, is not all hate of a human creature for his kind just such embittered egotism as this?

Alceste's even tempered friend, tactful man of the world that he is, answers his splenetic outcry in the following sane manner:

About the manners of the time, egad,
Let 's bother less, and more compassion show
To human nature, judging it with less
Asperity, viewing with charity
Its faults ; for in society we need
A pliant virtue, being often blamed
For knowledge far too great. Sane minds forsake
Extremes for wisdom and sobriety.
The rigid virtues of the ancient times
Too far offend the manners of our day,
Demand an excellence too great for man.
Seeking to rectify the faults of this
Poor world is second to no other folly ;
Hence graciously to custom we should bow.

Instead of profiting by this worldly wisdom, Alceste, harking back to his lawsuit, asserts that he will see whether "men have sufficient impudence, and are wicked, villainous, and perverse enough, to do him injustice in the face of the whole world"; whereupon Philinte, attacking him suddenly in his most vulnerable part, thus forces from his lips the true secret of his misanthropy:

PHILINTE

Think you this virtue you demand of all,
This worth wherein you hide yourself, prevails
In her you love ? At war with all mankind,
I am astonished that you find in spite
Of all that makes man odious, the charms
To soothe your eyes ; and I confess the choice
Your heart has made astounds me more. Éliante
The true admires, Arsinoé the prude
With tenderness regards you ; yet your heart
Is cold to both ; the meanwhile Célimène,

Whose coquetry and humour mischievous
Accord so well with our more modern ways,
In durance holds you with bewitching chains.
Hating these things so mortally, how brook
You them in one so fair; in one so sweet,
Are they no longer faults? Do you condone,
Or does it mean that you are blind to them?

ALCESTE

Nay, my regard for this young widow leaves
My eyes still open to her faults. For all
The love she has aroused, I am the first
To see and to condemn; yet spite of that,
My weakness I confess; for do whate'er
I may, she has the art of pleasing me.
In vain I see her faults, vainly I blame;
For notwithstanding all, she makes me love.
Great is her charm, — my love will purge her soul
Of all the passing vices of the time.

This frank confession goes far toward clearing Alceste from the charge of being a prig. His misanthropy is but the gall of a noble nature betrayed by a woman's heartlessness into magnifying its own woes until they become those of humanity. He is a great hearted, generous soul who loves the domestic virtues, — and falls in love with a coquette. Had she been a housewife, philanthropy, not misanthropy, would have been his passion. When he rails against the insincerity of the world, it is a woman's insincerity he means; thus, when Philinte tells him that Célimène's "steadfast and sincere" cousin Éliante would make him a far better wife than his chosen mistress, he exclaims in all asperity:

'T is true my reason tells me so each day;
Yet reason 's not the power to govern love.

This deeply human passion for an incorrigible flirt saves Alceste from being a wretched Timon. His brav-

ery, too, commands respect. To tell the world it is base demands a certain hardihood; but to tell a poet his verses are bad requires genuine courage.

This latter comes to pass when the conversation between the misanthrope and his tranquil friend is interrupted by Oronte, a fashionable poetaster with a sonnet he wishes to read to Alceste for the purpose of hearing if it is good enough for publication. "I have the fault of being a little too sincere," he is warned. "That is precisely what I wish!" cries the versifier; yet, being a poet, praise, not sincerity, is, of course, his expectation, — a desire made apparent in his assertion that he spent only a quarter of an hour in composing his verses. His sonnet might have been written by any of the Hôtel de Rambouillet poets, and so cleverly did its sighs to Phyllis imitate the precious poetry of the day that Molière's first auditors thought it decidedly good, and were astonished when Alceste, urged by Oronte to tell the truth, replied in all sincerity:

"Candidly, you had better put it in your closet. You have been following bad models, and your phrasing is not at all natural. . . . This figurative style that present writers are so vain of, is beside all good taste and truth. 'T is a mere trick of words, a sheer affectation; for it is not thus that nature speaks. The wretched taste of the age is what I dislike in this. Our forefathers, unpolished as they were, had far better judgment. Indeed, I value all we admire nowadays much less than an old song I shall repeat to you:

'If the King had given me
Paris his great town,
Then demand that I agree
On my love to frown —

Thus King Henry I should pray:
"Keep Paris as of yore;
I love my darling more," I 'd say,
"I love my darling more." '

"This versification is not rich," Alceste goes on to say, "and the style is antiquated; but do you not see it is far better than all that affectation at which good sense revolts, and that its passion speaks simply?"

Oronte, indignant at receiving the plain truth he had invited, sneers at the judgment of his blunt critic, and demands that he write verses on the same subject as a sample of his style.

Alas, I might write poetry as bad,
But I should never show it to the world,

Alceste replies, — a piece of candour which drives Oronte in peevish fury from the house.

In the second act artful Célimène pettishly receives Alceste's remonstrances against her coquetry, and when, reproaching her for permitting so many suitors to besiege her, he threatens to break from her thrall entirely, she craftily defends herself in the following ingenuous way:

For having suitors am I culpable?
Can I keep men from finding me engaging?
And if to see me they take gentle means,
A bludgeon must I use to drive them hence?

Alceste's retort shows clearly that he reads the heart he cannot sway:

You need, Madame, a less susceptive heart
More than a club. Your charms, I must concede,
Go with you everywhere; yet those your eyes
Attract are by your welcome held, and those
Who yield will find its proffered sweet completes
The slavery of soul your charm began.

Continuing in this reproachful vein, he asks how it is that Clitandre has the faculty of so pleasing her. "Is it the long nail on his little finger, his mass of ribbons, or the width of his *canons?*" Then in plaintive suppliancy he asks:

> And I, accused of too great jealousy,
> What more have I than all the rest, I pray?

"The happiness of knowing you are loved," Célimène replies; then, seeking to pacify him by the assurance that in the future no one shall deceive him but himself, she calls forth this genuine outburst of passion:

> Zounds, must I love
> You so? Ah, if I might retake my heart
> From your fair hand, for that rare boon I 'd bless
> The skies. To drive this terrible devotion
> From out my soul, I do my best, I grant;
> Yet all my greatest efforts are in vain;
> Indeed, 't is for my sins I love you thus.

Alceste emerges from this scene a lover such as all the world may love. His passion commands respect, while his misanthropy stands revealed as the vehemence of an embittered heart sorely tricked by an inexorable coquette. Meantime Célimène tortures her victim with the charge of loving only for the sake of quarrelling, while her drawing-room, gradually filling with fashionable friends, becomes a Vanity Fair.

There is no mistaking the atmosphere. It is the perfumed air of the boudoir in the days when gallantry was a fine art. With the Marquesses Clitandre and Acaste as ready pupils, the fribbling hostess becomes the mistress of as merciless a school for scandal as ever graced a drawing-room. Éliante, too genuine to matriculate, holds aloof; likewise Alceste, till anger overflows his heart; yet

how true are Célimène's vignettes of fashionable life! Take this picture of a snob, for instance, drawn in answer to Acaste's query as to the character of their mutual friend, Gérald:

Oh, the dull mumblenews!
He never fails the noble's part to play,
And in high circles he is ever found.
He only quotes a princess, prince, or duke;
His head by rank is ever turned; his talk
Is horses, carriages, or dogs; while men
Of highest quality he *thees* and *thous*,
And *mister* is a word beyond his ken.

Thackeray has painted no truer picture. How many of us, too, have dined with the rich upstart depicted in the following lines:

CLITANDRE

And young Cléon, whose hospitality
The worthiest have accepted — what of him?

CÉLIMÈNE

His merit is his cook; his board alone
The object of the visits that we pay.

Instigated by the two silly marquesses, portrait upon portrait is thus painted by Célimène's scathing wit, until honest Alceste lashes her band of scandalmongers with this whip of words:

Go on, my courtly friends, go on, till each
Has had his turn, till none is spared; yet let
But one of them appear, and you will rush
To greet him hurriedly, your hand extend,
A flattering kiss bestow, and protest make
Of meek servility in vows profound.

"Why do you attack us?" Clitandre asks. "If what is said wounds you, address your reproaches to the lady."

"No, pardie, it concerns you," Alceste replies, "for your approving smiles draw forth her slanderous shafts." Thus, even in his wrath, Alceste is the lover, though he accuses Célimène of "indulging in pastimes he cannot countenance." Both Clitandre and Acaste rushing to her defence with flattering assurances of her perfection, the misanthrope asserts that "the more we love, the less we should flatter,"— a doctrine refuted by Éliante in the following interpolated remnant from the translation of Lucretius's poem, *De Rerum Natura*, Molière made when Chapelle, Bernier, Cyrano de Bergerac, and he were students of Gassendi:

> Since lovers ever vaunt their choice, to brook
> Such laws love 's ill contrived. In loved ones Love
> Sees naught to blame ; for imperfections pass
> As charms with pretty names from lovers' lips.
> The pale one to the whiteness of the jasmine
> Is compared ; she whose sombreness inspires
> A goodly fear becomes a sweet brunette.
> The lean is lithe and has a comely shape ;
> The fat 's majestic with a carriage grand ;
> The sloven, graced with little charm, is styled
> A careless beauty ; e'en the giantess
> Appears a goddess to Love's eyes. The dwarf,
> Epitome of miracles divine
> Is deemed ; the haughty one a diadem
> Deserves ; the scapegrace ever teems with wit,
> And Mistress Nincompoop is wholly good.
> The chatterbox is dispositioned well ;
> If taciturn, she 's modest and reserved :
> For thus within the one adored, each fault,
> Each frailty, the ardent suitor loves.

A hint from the marquesses that Célimène excuse herself to their rival follows these lines ; but Alceste asserts that "he will never depart until they have left." This

lover's threat is unfulfilled, however, for Oronte the sonneteer, offended by Alceste's frank criticism, sends an officer to summon him before the *maréchaussée*, — a tribunal having jurisdiction in disputes between gentlemen. Protesting that only the King has power to make him approve bad verses, the misanthrope goes, as the curtain falls, assuring Célimène meanwhile that he will soon return to finish their argument.

The third act is of so little dramatic consequence that it might well be coupled with its predecessor. It presents a new character, however, in the person of Arsinoé the prude, so deliciously described by Célimène as —

> A humbug, double-faced!
> Worldly of heart, successless she has tried
> To hook her fish; so enviously she looks
> Upon the suitors in another's train;
> And so, forsaken in her wretched state,
> Must rail against the blindness of the age.
> With veil of counterfeited prudery,
> She seeks to hide the solitude of home;
> To save the credit of her feeble charms,
> She brands as criminal the powers they lack.
> Forsooth a lover mightily would please
> My lady; even now, methinks, she looks
> Upon Alceste with tenderness heartfelt.

Visiting Célimène with intent to thwart Alceste's passion, Arsinoé asserts a friend's right to warn her hostess that she should appear, as well as be, above reproach, — an effrontery which calls forth the following retort:

> Madame, 't is easy all to blame or praise,
> And each is right according to his age
> Or taste. For coquetry there is a time,
> And also one for prudery: one may

For polity take to it when the charms
Of youth are faded, — cruel ravages
Of time it often hides. I do not say
I shall not follow your example bright
In after years, — age leads to all, Madame;
Yet twenty 's not the time to play the prude.

The victor in this feminine passage at arms leaves her crestfallen foe with Alceste, who "comes very opportunely," as she says, "and will better supply my place in entertaining you." Playing upon the misanthrope's vanity, Arsinoé assures him that "people of exceptional merit attract her," and "if some place at court might tempt him," suggests that "a great many engines may be set in motion by her to serve him"; but Alceste showing plainly that "in ushering him into the world Heaven did not give him a mind suited to a court atmosphere," Arsinoé is forced to try venom instead of flattery. Arousing the misanthrope's jealousy, she tells him that if he will escort her home, she will give him indubitable proof of Célimène's disloyalty, adding that "if his eyes would only shine for other eyes, she might offer him consolation," — a piece of feline hardihood which brings the third act to a close.

"Alas," Alceste exclaims in the ensuing act, "all is ruined! I am betrayed, I am stricken to death! Célimène deceives me, and is faithless," — an unreasoning outburst prompted by a letter supposedly written by Célimène to Oronte, which Arsinoé has given him. So infuriated is Alceste that he lays his heart at the feet of Éliante, to punish Célimène, as he says, "by a transfer of his sincere attachment and profound love to another." Having just received a proposal from Philinte, prudent Eliante retires without declining either suitor's hand,

thereby showing herself not altogether free from the arts of Célimène.

Alceste's passion is, indeed, "a savage jealousy that sometimes savours nobly." When confronted with the letter, Célimène, steeped in the ways of coquetry, acknowledges it to be hers, but hints that it may have been written to a woman; then refusing to confess the truth or falsity of this, she scorns her lover's charges, telling him "it matters little to her what he thinks." The way in which this incomparable coquette holds her wretched lover spellbound is best told in the words of the play:

ALCESTE, *aside*

O Heavenly Power, can greater cruelty
Be forged? Was ever heart so used? I come
In anger just to chide, and I, instead,
Am quarrelled with. My anguish, my mistrust,
Are driven to the uttermost. She boasts
Of everything, she lets me credit all;
And yet to break these irksome bonds, to arm
Against the thankless object of this love,
My heart is still too base.
(*To Célimène.*) Ah, traitorous one!
You know the way to turn this feebleness
Against myself; the way to controvert
To your sole use the riots of a fatal
Passion, the offspring of your treacherous eyes.
Defend yourself against this whelming crime,
And cease to feign disloyalty to me.
Assert this letter's innocence, I pray,
If so it can be proved, — my love extends
A willing hand. Ah, strive constant to seem,
And to believe you so, I 'll force myself.

CÉLIMÈNE

Away! your jealous transports drive you mad.
My love you do not merit in the least.

I 'd like to know if any one can make
Me sink for you to base deceit, and should
My heart unto another lean, I 'd like
To know the reason why I should not tell
You candidly. Does not, forsooth, the kind
Assurance of my sentiments avert
Your doubts from me ? In face of guaranty
Like this, possess they any gravity ?
To lend them ear is an affront to me ;
And since my sex's honour, enemy
Of woman's love, to such avowal is
Opposed so strictly, should a faithful swain
Who for his sake has seen these stumbling-blocks
O'ercome, mistrust with such impunity
The oracle, and is he not to blame
If he should fail to satisfy himself
Upon a matter never told until
Great battles with one's self are hazarded ?
Away, away ! such doubts deserve my wrath.
You merit not my thought. I am a fool ;
And vexed I am at my simplicity
In feeling still so graciously toward you.
I ought to place my heart elsewhere and give
You just and ample cause to make complaint.

ALCESTE

Ah, traitress, mine is strange infatuation !
Those tender words are doubtless meant to trick —
What matters it ? To fate I must submit.
My soul is wrapt in you, and I shall watch
Your heart's behaviour to the bitter end,
Learning if to betray it 's black enough.

CÉLIMÈNE

No, no, you do not love me as one must
Be loved.

ALCESTE

Alas ! to my surpassing love
Is nothing comparable ; for in the ardour
Shown to all, even to the end it goes

Of forming 'gainst you wild desires. Ah, yes,
I wish that amiable you ne'er were found ;
And furthermore that you to some mean state
Would fall ; that Heaven at your birth did naught
Bestow ; that you had neither fortune, rank,
Nor lineage, in order that my heart,
By noble sacrifice, your unjust lot
Might remedy ; and that I might, to-day,
The joy and glory have of seeing you
Accept your all from Love's adoring hand.

CÉLIMÈNE

A manner strange, indeed, to wish me well.
That you the chance will have, may Heaven forfend !

Before Alceste can bring this wayward flirt to terms, his servant appears in haste to tell him he is threatened with arrest in connection with his lawsuit. As the curtain falls upon his unquenched passion, he says to Célimène:

It seems that Fate, whate'er I do, has sworn
My holding converse with you to prevent.
To triumph over her, permit my love
Again to see you ere the day has closed.

Having paid twenty thousand francs to settle his lawsuit and been ordered by the *maréchaussée* to embrace his enemy the sonneteer, Alceste, resolved to retire for ever from this "cut-throat hole" of a world, comes to learn whether Célimène's heart has any love for him, and overhears Oronte paying court to her; whereupon he confronts the guilty pair and demands that she decide, once for all, whose affection she prefers. Thus brought to bay, the flirt is temporising, by inviting her cousin Éliante to decide the merits of the case, when Acaste and Clitandre, each bearing a letter addressed by Célimène to the other, burst upon the scene. These they proceed to read aloud. In the one Acaste is dismissed as "a

little marquess whose sole merit is his cloak and sword"; in the other Clitandre, as "the last man in the world whom she could love." Oronte, too, is dubbed one "whose prose bores as much as his poetry"; while Alceste, "the man with the green shoulder-knot, amuses sometimes with his bluntness and his surly grumbling, although there are hundreds of occasions when he is the greatest bore in the world." Her perfidious coquetry thus unmasked, Célimène stands defenceless, as one by by one her suitors leave her house in scorn, Alceste, alone of all the pack, remaining.

Her pride is humbled at last. Yielding her coquette's sceptre, she pleads for mercy, yet cannot forswear the flesh-pots:

CÉLIMÈNE

You may say all.
To censure as you will, or to complain, —
You have, indeed, the right; for I confess
The injury, and my bewildered heart
With vain excuse ne'er seeks to pay its debt.
The anger of the others I despise;
The guilt of my offence toward you, I grant.
Beyond all doubt, your indignation 's just;
I know how culpable I must appear;
How all bespeaks my treason. In a word,
You have a true and righteous cause to hate.
And I must give you leave.

ALCESTE

How can I, traitress?
And how can I all tenderness subdue?
Even should I wish most ardently to hate,
Will my own heart stand ready to obey?
(*To Éliante and Philinte.*) You see the path unworthy passion treads —
I make you each a witness to my folly;

Yet, to confess the truth, this is not all,
You 'll see me push it to the bitterest end,
And prove it wrong to deem me wise ; for something
Of man all hearts contain.
(*To Célimène.*) Unfaithful one,
I shall forget your crime ; and my poor heart
Shall find a way to pardon your misdeeds.
For with the name of feebleness to which
The vices of the time have led your youth,
I 'll cover all, provided your own heart
Will lend a willing hand to the intent
I 've formed of fleeing far from all mankind ;
And that unto the desert where I 've vowed
To live, you 'll quickly follow. Only thus
The injury these notes have wrought, can you
In every mind repair ; for after scandal
Which noble hearts abhor, 't is only thus
I may permit myself to love you still.

CÉLIMÈNE

What ! I renounce the world before I 'm old,
And in your desert vast entomb myself ?

ALCESTE

Ah ! if your passion answers to my love,
What imports anything in this poor world ?
Are not your wishes gratified by me ?

CÉLIMÈNE

A heart of twenty is by solitude
Dismayed ; and mine has not sufficient strength
Or grandeur to conform to such a plan.
If the offer of my heart will satisfy
Your love, I might decide to forge such bonds ;
For marriage . . .

ALCESTE

Nay, my heart but hates you now,
And this refusal has done more than all.
Since all in me you cannot find, in ties

Thus dear, as I find all in you, go hence!
Your offer I decline; by this deep wrong,
I 'm freed from your ignoble chains for ever.

Consistent even in defeat, Célimène retires, humbled but undismayed, to lay her coquette's snare, as one firmly believes, for some new dupe; while Alceste, witness of the equable union of Éliante and Philinte, exclaims to these lovers, whose wooing has been as calm as their characters:

To taste true happiness, this tenderness
For one another may you guard for e'er!
By malice overborne, upon all sides
Betrayed, I leave this pit where vice exults,
To find upon the earth some lonely place,
Where one is free to be an honest man.

True to his art, Molière thus leaves his hero the victim of his own spleen. As he goes out to begin the fulfilment of his vow, Philinte follows, calling to Éliante to aid him "in thwarting the scheme his friend's heart has proposed." Indeed, Alceste is far too noble and lovable to live eternally entombed in his desert, exclaiming, with Shakespeare's Timon:

"I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind."

He might better say, like Orsino, "If ever thou shalt love, in the sweet pangs of it remember me; for such as I am, all true lovers are." When happy and contented, one may smile at Alceste's impotent invectives against the vices of society and even scoff at the sincerity of his jealous transports; yet if the world be awry, his character appears both sympathetic and noble.

Although not presented until June fourth, 1666, *The Misanthrope* was placed upon the stocks as early as

1664; and according to Grimarest it had been read at court before it was played at the Palais Royal. Although Michelet[1] insists that neither the King nor his nobility was pleased with it, because "Alceste scolded the court more than he did Célimène," seventeenth century evidence tends to prove that it was most appreciated by the classes it satirised,[2] — a likely supposition, since at the present day plays of Anglo-Saxon fashionable life are best received in London or New York, where the auditors are largely drawn from the class capable of recognising the truth of the picture presented on the stage.

The Hypocrite, dealing with a prevalent vice, and well advertised by five years of religious persecution, played to what a modern manager would call "capacity business," whereas the receipts of *The Misanthrope*, so essentially a comedy of manners, were considerably less and its run of shorter duration; yet to Boileau, Molière was, above all else, "the author of *The Misanthrope*," while Racine, when told that it had failed, replied: "I don't believe it, because it is impossible for Molière to write a bad play."

Men and women of fashion, convinced that here was a true picture of society, acclaimed each character a portrait. Thus Alceste was likened to Julie d'Angennes' atrabilious husband, the Duc de Montausier; Clitandre and Acaste were found to be the Comte de Guiche and the Duc de Saint-Aignan; Philinte, Molière's epicurean friend Chapelle; and Célimène, the Duchesse de Longue-

[1] *Histoire de France.*

[2] De Subligny, *La Muse Dauphine*, June seventeenth, 1666; Donneau de Vizé, *Lettre écrite sur la comédie du Misanthrope*, published as an introduction to the first edition of the play.

ville, although, as M. Mesnard points out, this princess of the blood royal must needs be dragged from a convent to become the type of worldliness. Molière's misanthrope, too, has been called a symbol of Jansenism,[1] his play a noble plea for social tolerance, or the hero merely an expression of the author's art of making honest people laugh, according to each critic's temperament.

In the perennial riddle he presents, Alceste resembles Hamlet, and like the melancholy Dane, offers the actor an enigmatic rôle, demanding the highest histrionism. Indeed, that most eminent of modern comedians, M. Constant Coquelin, in a charming monograph upon the subject, quotes some wiseacre as saying that "one of the first symptoms of an actor's insanity is to wish to play *The Misanthrope*."[2] Confessing that his physical aspect alone has prevented his essaying the rôle, M. Coquelin takes a comedian's view of Alceste, and, denying him the attributes of a Hamlet, Faust, or Manfred, pronounces him a comedy character conceived by a comedian who, "pen in hand, obeyed his genius and not his passions."

This leads to the inevitable discussion of the play's subjectiveness; for Alceste, a man of middle age in love with an arrant flirt, has often been pronounced an expression of Molière's self. The evidence, of course, is purely circumstantial; yet, like that of *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives*, it is too much of a coincidence to be disregarded; for at the very time when Molière was driven by the frivolity of his own wife to part from her, he conceived Alceste, a hater of mankind inspired by a woman's heartlessness.

[1] *L'Énigme d'Alceste* by Gérard du Boulan, 1879.

[2] *Molière et le Misanthrope*, 1881.

For a comedian to see only a comedy part in Alceste is in the nature of a professional judgment; yet to deny this misanthrope a place in the sphere of Hamlet is to deny his author the attribute of profound philosophy and a niche beside Shakespeare; for though Molière may be inferior to our own "myriad minded" genius in his imagery and in the sublimity of his conceptions, as a creator he is, as M. Coquelin himself so happily expresses it, "his equal in fecundity, his superior in truth." Moreover, when he most nearly depicts his own suffering, his plays are most truly "the applause, the delight, and the wonder of the stage."

Very likely, as M. Coquelin suggests, "if Molière is in *The Misanthrope*, it is far more in the wise and indulgent calm of Philinte than in the stubborn, contentious puritanism of Alceste," for Philinte represents the clear-sighted sanity of the writer's mind. Alceste's love and jealousy, however, are the impassioned sufferings of a heart overborne by a coquette's cruelty; so it is as idle to deny his subjectiveness as to gainsay the objectiveness of Célimène, — a rôle light and vain as Armande Béjart, and written to be played by her. For Molière to choose a lovers' quarrel so nearly resembling his own, a hero so like himself in many essentials, and a heroine who might readily pass as a portrait of his wife, and then fail to express his own wounded feelings in the verses spoken by Alceste, would be impossible, if he be granted a heart. Indeed, to be immortal, a writer must be sincere, — a quality demanding a breadth of feeling alone aroused by a personal experience of life.

Molière's genius was eclectic; so neither Alceste nor Philinte is an actual portrait of himself. To mould the

character of his misanthrope, he formed an imaginative alloy, using Monsieur de Montausier for the spleen, if you like, and Boileau for the literary acumen, — as this critic has confessed; but from his own misery sprang the love and jealousy.

XV

MOLIÈRE AND THE PHYSICIANS

In the untiring warfare Molière waged against the evils of society, his campaign against quackery, if not the most brilliant, was certainly the most prolonged. Beginning while he was still a strolling player, it lasted until the hour of his death; for, with a fatality the medical men considered righteous judgment, he was seized with his last illness while playing the title rôle of *The Imaginary Invalid*, perhaps the most bitter of his satires against the physicians of his time.

This enmity toward a calling at once so worthy and humane appears, at first sight, unreasonable. Indeed, some knowledge of the French medical faculty of the seventeenth century is necessary in order that one may sympathise with the biting satire of *Love as a Doctor*, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, and *The Imaginary Invalid*, the four principal medical satires from Molière's pen. *The Flying Physician* and *The Physician in Love*, two *canevas* of his youth, the latter of which has been lost, had medicine as the topic of their humour as well; therefore Molière's warfare against the medical faculty may be said to have begun during his "barn storming" days. Moreover, he was not the only dramatist of that period to make the quack a comedy character; for, at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Guillot-Gorju, once a medical student himself, acquired

his reputation as a buffoon in the rôle of comic doctor. Certainly the charlatan of the Pont Neuf selling balms and opiates while acrobats tumbled and clowns grimaced, was so little removed in point of science from the licensed physician riding in cap and gown through the streets of Paris to bleed, or to administer an antimony pill, that no writer of plays possessing a sense of humour could overlook the mirth-provoking possibilities of such medicine.[1]

On the left bank of the Seine, in the heart of the ancient quarter where students in flowing gowns discoursed in Latin and pedantic doctors in crimson robes upheld the dignity of learning, a sombre building bearing on its façade the inscription *Urbi et orbi salus* stood amid a labyrinth of tortuous streets. For two centuries or more this dingy edifice had been the home of the Faculty of Medicine, youngest of the four faculties of the University of Paris, yet the most lucrative and by far the most widely known of these, since to the world at large it was *the* Faculty.

Born in the cloisters of mediæval monasteries, it had grown, but had not changed. It was powerful and respected, yet faithful to its spirit and traditions, — a proud, independent body, teaching and exercising the liberal profession of which it held a monopoly ; a body so exclusive that its members scarcely exceeded a hundred in number, or, to be more explicit, about one physician to each five thousand of the inhabitants of Paris. When they met

[1] In depicting the medical faculty of Molière's day the author's facts have been gleaned from Maurice Raynaud's delightful monograph, *Les Médecins au temps de Molière*, in which both the foibles and virtues of the seventeenth century physicians are treated with an impartiality most praiseworthy in a writer himself a member of the profession.

in solemn conclave, even these were divided into two classes, the Senior and Junior Bench, — a distinction made not according to age or ability, but to length of service.

In dignity, however, if not in common sense, the Faculty was admirable. Imagine a gloomy amphitheatre lighted by a stained glass window; imagine a hundred doctors in violet cassocks and ermine trimmed robes of scarlet silk seated amid a throng of sable gowned students, while their dean, surrounded by his mace bearers, vaunts in Ciceronian periods the ancient glories of a liberal profession; and one will have a fairly accurate picture of the Faculty in conclave assembled, — a pageant "inferior," as M. Raynaud remarks, "to such an assembly of kings as the Roman senate, yet certainly not lacking in solemnity or grandeur."

The supremacy of professional dignity over professional skill is well indicated by the oath a professor of medicine took when nominated:

> I swear and pronounce faithfully to teach in a long gown with wide sleeves, a doctoral cap upon my head, a knot of scarlet ribbon on my shoulder.

Still, the Faculty was not without its virtues. At a moment when none of the great hygienic institutions which adorn modern society existed, it did its best to supply this want by fulfilling the functions of both the academy of medicine and the board of health. However, it wished progress to come from within itself, not elsewhere; so surgery fell in sacrifice to its illiberality. Thus, too, the circulation of the blood was proscribed because it was English; antimony, because it came from Montpellier; and quinquina, because it was American, —

"three senseless and barren acts," as M. Raynaud says, "which laid it open to public ridicule."

Confined in its investigations to the bodies of criminals, the Faculty was compelled to wait for its anatomical subjects until an execution took place, whereupon the criminal lieutenant notified the dean, who, in turn, sent the grand beadle to summon the doctors and students. If at peace with the surgeons, they too were invited; yet, owing to the dignity of science and the indignity of manual exercise, the professor was esteemed a man so erudite that he must remain upon the heights of learning, and not descend to manipulate the scalpel himself; hence it often happened that the modest preparator knew more than the master.

That the knowledge of the Faculty was not far from quackery is attested by two prolonged and acrimonious disputes in which its members indulged. Does the blood circulate? Is antimony a panacea for all pain? These were problems about which medical men wrangled during the greater part of the seventeenth century; while in disputing the validity of Harvey's great discovery, such absurd arguments as the following were used: "If the blood circulates, it is useless to bleed, because the loss sustained by an organ will be immediately repaired, hence bleeding is useless; therefore the blood does not circulate."

The cause of antimony — *le vin émétique*, as Molière calls it — was espoused by the Faculty of Montpellier, therefore the Faculty of Paris regarded it with suspicion. "In brief," to use M. Raynaud's words, "this controversy was at bottom the old but ever new question as to what part the accessary sciences should play in medicine." Lest the technical pedantry of this dispute grow tedious,

it may be summed up in the means of transportation adopted by members of the two schools of medicine when visiting their patients. The doctors of the old school rode upon mules, while those who upheld the new doctrines used horses, — an appropriateness of selection which is apparent.

To Molière's sane mind these empirical physicians, absorbed in interminable scholastic wranglings and opposed to everything in the nature of progress, were frauds only a little less deep in dye than the hypocritical directors of conscience. His gauntlet was thrown to them by Don Juan, when Sganarelle, disguised as a medical man, prescribes for half a dozen peasants, and asks his master whether it would not be strange "if those sick people got well and then came to thank me?" The scoffer replies:

Why not? why should not you have the same privileges as other doctors? They have no more to do in curing patients than you, for their art is pure humbug. What they do is to take credit when a case turns out well; so you, as well as they, may reap the advantage that comes from an invalid's good fortune, and see attributed to your remedies all that may happen from good luck or the forces of nature.

When in this same scene Don Juan's doubts regarding the efficacy of drugs are rebuked by Sganarelle as follows, the craze for antimony receives a telling thrust from Molière's satirical rapier:

SGANARELLE

Your mind is wretchedly distrustful. You know that antimony is now making a great stir in the world. Its wonders have converted the most incredulous persons, and less than three weeks ago I saw it produce a marvellous effect.

DON JUAN

What was that?

SGANARELLE

A man had been at the point of death for six days; nobody knew what to prescribe, no remedy did any good. At last antimony was tried.

DON JUAN

He got well, then?

SGANARELLE

No, he died.

DON JUAN

The effect was marvellous, indeed.

SGANARELLE

Of course it was. He had been dying for six days, and the antimony killed him at once. Could anything have done it better?

But Molière attacked the dishonesty and pretence of the doctors even more than their ignorance. Indeed his shafts were really aimed at the Tartuffes of medicine; for in those days charlatanism was rife, and pedantry a shield for ignorance. In academic robes and pointed caps the doctors rode about Paris on their mules, impressing the populace with their importance, while in sick-room consultations they imposed upon their victims by concealing their ignorance behind grandiloquent Latin phrases, — a view of the profession not upheld by Molière alone, as this epigram of his day witnesses:

Assume a most pedantic frown,
  Some Greek or Latin spout;
Have on a wig and grotesque gown
  Of satin furred about;
For such things almost make, we own,
  A doctor out and out.

In *Love as a Doctor* (*L'Amour médecin*), the play which followed *Don Juan*, Molière entered the fray in earnest. No longer ridiculing medicine in the abstract, he made the physicians themselves the object of his satire. It will be remembered that in this play Sganarelle's daughter falls ill of the malady called love, whereupon her father summons four doctors in consultation, all of whom fail to diagnose her disease.[1] The names of these worthies are Tomès, Desfonandrès, Macroton, and Bahis. In this connection Brossette, speaking through Cizeron Rival, editor of his posthumous papers,[2] tells us that "Molière travestied the principal court physicians, MM. des Fougerais, Esprit, Guenaut, and d'Aquin, with masks expressly made for the purpose, while Boileau composed suitable Greek names for them. Thus, "to M. des Fougerais he gave the name of Desfonandrès, which signifies *killer of men;* to M. Esprit, who sputters, that of Bahis, which means *yelping*, *barking;* while Macroton was the name he gave to M. Guenaut because he speaks slowly; and finally that of Tomès, denoting *bleeder*, went to M. d'Aquin, who delights in bleeding."

Gui Patin,[3] too, polemical medical man of the day, and possessed of a considerable sense of humour, wrote a friend, shortly after *Love as a Doctor* was produced, to the effect that a comedy against the court physicians was acted at Versailles in which the first five doctors were singled out, while three days later he added that "*L'Amour malade* (*sic*) is now being played at the Hôtel

[1] See page 255.

[2] *Récréations littéraires*, 1765.

[3] The originals of the passages from Gui Patin, quoted by M. Raynaud and M. Mesnard, occur in *Lettres choisies de feu Mr. Guy Patin*, Cologne, 1691.

de Bourgogne, where all Paris rushes to see the court physicians on the stage, especially Esprit and Guenaut with masks expressly made for the purpose."

Needless to say, Molière's comedy was not played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne; nevertheless Gui Patin's evidence, coinciding so exactly with Cizeron Rival's assurance that "the principal court physicians were travestied with masks," has led to considerable discussion whether or not Molière's doctors actually appeared *à l'Aristophane*, — a supposition dismissed by M. Mesnard[1] with the suggestion that Patin wrote from hearsay, while Cizeron Rival merely repeated the statements.

To appreciate the satire of *Love as a Doctor*, no archæological research is necessary, however, for when Sganarelle's servant, Lisette, makes haste to tell her master that his daughter is dangerously ill, that worthy loosens his purse strings so far as to indulge in the expense of not only one but four doctors, — an extravagance which calls forth the following irony on the part of the maid:

Now, pay attention! You will be highly instructed — they will inform you in Latin that your daughter is ill.

Instead of consulting upon the nature of the sick girl's malady, Sganarelle's plethora of medical men argue upon the relative excellence of mules and horses as a professional means of conveyance, until a new discussion is thus incited by one of their number:

TOMÈS

By the bye, which side do you take in the quarrel between the two physicians, Theophrastus and Artemius? It is a matter which divides the profession.

[1] *Œuvres de Molière.*

DESFONANDRÈS

I am for Artemius.

TOMÈS

So am I; not that his advice did not kill the patient, as we know, while that of Theophrastus was assuredly better; but because the latter was wrong in the circumstances in holding an opinion opposed to his senior. What say you?

DESFONANDRÈS

Certainly. Professional etiquette must always be preserved, no matter what happens.

TOMÈS

For my part, I am devilish strict about it, except among my friends. When three of us were called in consultation the other day with an *outside doctor*,[1] I stopped the whole proceeding and refused to permit any one to express an opinion until matters were conducted according to rule. The people of the house did all they could, — the case was pressing, — but I would not give way; so the patient died bravely, while the dispute continued.

DESFONANDRÈS

You did quite right to teach those people how to behave, and show them their inexperience.

TOMÈS

A dead man is only a dead man, and is of no consequence; but a neglected formality does great harm to the entire profession.

In the scene wherein the four doctors tell Sganarelle the result of their consultation, Molière's satire is even more poignant:

[1] The "outside doctor" with whom this worthy upholder of the old school of medicine was loath to consult was doubtless a member of the Faculty of Montpellier.

TOMÈS

Sir, we have duly argued upon your daughter's complaint, and my opinion is that it proceeds from the overheating of the blood; consequently I would have her bled as soon as possible.

DESFONANDRÈS

And I say that her illness arises from a putrefaction of humours caused by a too great repletion; consequently, I would give her an emetic. (the inducing of vomiting)

TOMÈS

I maintain that an emetic will kill her.

DESFONANDRÈS

And I, that bleeding will be the death of her.

TOMÈS

It is like you to set up for a clever man!

DESFONANDRÈS

Yes, it is like me; and at least I can cope with you in all branches of knowledge.

TOMÈS

Do you recall the man you killed a few days ago?

DESFONANDRÈS

Do you recollect the woman you sent to the other world three days ago?

TOMÈS (*to Sganarelle*)

I have given you my opinion.

DESFONANDRÈS (*to Sganarelle*)

I have told you what I think.

TOMÈS

If your daughter is not bled directly, she is a dead woman.

[*Exit.*

DESFONANDRÈS

If you have her bled, she will not be alive a quarter of an hour afterward. [*Exit.*

The two physicians remaining arrive at the conclusion that "it is better to die according to rule than to recover in violation of it," whereupon Sganarelle exclaims dejectedly, "Here am I, even more in the dark than before. Deuce take it, I 'll buy some Orviétan, and make her swallow that." [1]

The counterpart of this scene is found in Gui Patin's account of a consultation held at the time of Mazarin's death, whereat four famous court physicians failed to agree upon the disease of which the great man was dying. "Brayer," to quote Patin, "said the spleen was infected, Guenaut that it was the liver, while Valot insisted it was water on the lungs, and Des Fougerais that it was an abscess in the mesentery." The apostle of the liver apparently triumphed, for shortly after Mazarin's death a carter, recognising Guenaut in the midst of a street blockade, called out, "Let the doctor pass! Thanks to him we are rid of the Cardinal."

No sooner had *Love as a Doctor* been produced than its author, borne down by overwork and domestic unhappiness, was seized with an illness so severe that he was obliged to close his theatre for a time and subsist upon milk for two months, — an event affording him ample opportunity to test the inefficacy of medicine. His disease, according to the doctors of to-day, was either tuberculosis or an aneurism, manifesting itself by a cough so

[1] Orviétan was a quack remedy named after a famous charlatan of the Pont Neuf.

characteristic that Boulanger de Chalussay in his libellous play[1] makes a character exclaim, "Yes, it is he. I just recognised his cough." Failing to find relief, Molière manifested his resentment toward the doctors in a way, to quote M. Bazin, "comparable to the revolt of an incorrigible sinner against Heaven."[2] Had he been willing to retire from the stage, his life might have been prolonged; but instead of seeking rest, he fought an incurable disease with a steadfastness truly heroic. He could not refrain, however, from lashing the quacks who failed to relieve his suffering. Thus a fifth physician, by name Filerin, is introduced in *Love as a Doctor*, apparently for no other purpose than to voice the author's own scepticism, in a speech made to Tomès and Desfonandrès:

For my part, I fail to understand the bad policy of some of our people; and it must be admitted that all these bickerings have lately brought us into an ill repute so pronounced that if we are not careful we shall bring ruin upon ourselves. I do not speak for my personal interest, for, thank Heaven, I have settled my own affairs. Whether it blows or rains or hails, those who are dead are dead, and I have enough to live upon without thinking of those who are alive; but all these squabbles do the medical men no good. Since Providence has been so kind to us for ages past as to make the world infatuated with us, we should not disabuse mankind with our senseless disputes, but should take advantage of its gullibility as gently as we can. . . . The greatest weakness in men is their love of life, and we, availing ourselves of this by our ostentatious nonsense, know how to make the most of the veneration the fear

[1] *Élomire hypocondre.*

[2] *Notes historiques sur la vie de Molière.*

of death inspires for our profession. Let us therefore maintain for ourselves that degree of esteem which man's weakness has given us, and be united regarding our patients, so that we may attribute to ourselves the fortunate results of an illness, and blame nature for all the blunders of our art.

In *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (*Le Médecin malgré lui*), Molière satirised medicine with less acerbity. Having run the gamut of middle class stupidity and egotism, vain, cowardly, self-interested Sganarelle makes his final appearance in the title rôle, descending in this instance several steps below the social status of even Don Juan's cringing servant. A sly, drunken rogue of the people, this new Sganarelle, by trade a woodcutter, bears slight resemblance save in Rabelaisian mirth to his namesakes, though he may assert a certain kinship with the imaginary cuckold. Having learned the rudiments of Latin and a smattering of Aristotle from a famous doctor whom he once served, he has become a lazy, tippling lout who begins his comedy career by practising upon Martine, his shrewish better half, the doctrine that a wife, like a dog and a walnut tree, needs to be beaten to better be; yet when a well-meaning neighbour chivalrously intervenes in behalf of the lady, both wife and husband unite in trouncing him for meddling in their domestic affairs.[1]

Although Martine thus resents a stranger's interference, she vows vengeance, nevertheless, upon her lord and master. When the servants of a wealthy bourgeois, whose daughter's sudden loss of speech has baffled his

[1] A few months ago the Parisian press chronicled a similar occurrence, wherein a passer-by, attempting to rescue a wife from the blows of her lord, was set upon by both and soundly beaten for his impudence.

family physicians, arrive in search of a man of science capable of curing their young mistress, she points out her husband as the one they seek, assuring them he is a "strange fellow who keeps his knowledge to himself," and warning them, meantime, that "he will never own he is a physician unless they each take a stick and compel him by dint of blows to admit it." This drastic argument is forthwith applied, with the result that Sganarelle acknowledges a medical prowess unsuspected theretofore. His skill in the use of dog Latin, however, is insufficient to loosen a tongue tied voluntarily to prevent a distasteful marriage; so the invalid he is brought to treat remains dumb until Léandre, her lover, bribes this doctor in spite of himself to introduce him into her father's house disguised as an apothecary. Léandre's presence inspires a cure so marvellous that the father prays Sganarelle to make his daughter dumb once more. "That is impossible," the rogue replies; "all I can do is to make you deaf."

Sganarelle's fame as a doctor being now firmly established, he vows medicine is "the best of all trades," since, "whether we manage well or ill, we are paid just the same"; yet his good fortune is short-lived, for while he is reaping the fruits of his skill a servant informs the master of the house that his daughter has eloped with the pseudo-apothecary. The duped parent sends for a magistrate to deal with Sganarelle, "a villain he will have punished by the law," whereupon the servant, whose plump wife Sganarelle has been making love to in a most suggestive way, exclaims with undisguised glee, "I am afraid, Master Doctor, you will be hanged!"

The noose is cheated, however, for the elopers return

to beg forgiveness, — a boon readily granted when Sganarelle's patron learns that his daughter's admirer has just inherited a fortune from an uncle. Meanwhile the worthy doctor in spite of himself, induced to pardon his wife for the trick she has played him, warns her to prepare herself "henceforth to treat a man of his consequence with great respect, for the anger of a physician is more to be dreaded than the world imagines."

As a satire upon the medical faculty, this comedy is less bitter than its predecessor. Indeed, the irony is conveyed more by implication than by word of mouth, as when the father of Sganarelle's patient says to that rogue: "I have no doubt your reasoning is most excellent, but there is only one thing that puzzles me: the side (in the human body) of the liver and of the heart. It seems to me that you place them wrong, that the heart is on the left side and the liver on the right." "Formerly it was so," Sganarelle replies, "but we have changed all that" (*nous avons changé tout cela*), — a phrase which has become a French proverb.[1]

The source of this comedy has been traced to a *fabliau* or metrical folk tale of the middle ages, in which a peasant's wife avenges conjugal cruelty by assuring two servants of the king in search of a doctor to heal their royal master's daughter, that her husband is a physician "who will do nothing for any one unless he is well beaten."

[1] The inspiration of this scene, according to M. Mesnard, was the dissection of a criminal's body chronicled by *The Gazette*, December seventeenth, 1650, wherein the presiding doctor demonstrated that "the liver was on the left side and the spleen on the right, while the heart inclined to the right side, the majority of the organs being placed otherwise than is commonly the case."

A play by Lope de Vega, too, bears a resemblance in certain scenes to Molière's comedy, while the title of one of our poet's early *canevas*, *The Fagot Gatherer* (*Le Fagotier*), indicates that the material had already appeared, probably in one-act form; but whatever its source may be, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* is a play fulfilling Molière's own canon of dramatic art that "the rule of all rules is to please," — a fact well evidenced by the popularity it has retained for more than two centuries. According to figures computed to the year 1870, it had been performed at the Comédie Française more times than any of Molière's plays save *The Hypocrite*,[1] — a verdict later statistics would doubtless ratify, since, rapid in action, replete with comic situations and droll characters, it possesses all the requisites of "side-splitting" farce, while its characterisation entitles it to be dignified by the name of comedy. Indeed, in criticising Molière's work, one is likely to be led by his marvellous ability as a painter of human nature into overlooking the line of demarcation between the higher and lower forms of stage humour.

The Doctor in Spite of Himself was placed upon the stage of the Palais Royal August sixth, 1666, during the run of *The Misanthrope;* and, being presented in conjunction with that masterpiece, it aided its receipts materially, — a fact which caused Voltaire to remark that "*The Misanthrope* is the work of a philosopher who wrote for enlightened people, yet found it necessary to disguise himself as a *farceur* in order to please the multitude."[2]

When Molière's health had improved temporarily,

[1] *Œuvres de Molière* by Eugène Despois and Paul Mesnard.

[2] *Vie de Molière, avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.*

and his long war against the pharisees had ended in triumph, he so far relented toward the medical men as to say in his preface to *The Hypocrite* that "medicine is a profitable art which every one reveres as one of the most excellent things we possess," — a leniency again made apparent in a petition he presented the King on behalf of "an honest doctor whose patient he had the honour of being." In this he tells Louis that if he will grant his medical friend a sinecure, he (Molière) has been promised "thirty years of life." "Dare I demand this boon," the poet asks, "the day *The Hypocrite* is resuscitated by your kindness? The first of these favours reconciles me with the devotees; the second would accomplish the same result with the doctors." On another occasion, too, he betrayed kindliness, at least, toward medicine in conversation with the King. "What does your doctor do for you?" Louis asked. "Sire," Molière answered, "we argue together, and he prescribes remedies I never take; therefore I get well."

Molière's health, however, did not long permit his heart to retain such conciliatory sentiments toward medicine; so when *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* was written to grace a royal fête held at Chambord during the autumn of 1669, his resentment toward the Faculty again manifested itself. In this three-act comedy ballet in prose the action is developed solely by the devices Éraste employs to prevent Julie, whom he loves, from marrying Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, a country lawyer to whom Oronte, her father, has promised her hand. To further his purpose, Éraste employs Sbrigani and Nérine, a couple of rogues well meriting the title of "intriguers" given them in the list of characters.

When the play opens, the arrival of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac in Paris is momentarily expected. His fate is thus foreshadowed by the speech of Nérine to Julie:

Can your father be serious in thinking to force you to marry this Limoges barrister, this Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, whom he has never seen in his life, who is coming to carry you off under our very noses? Should three or four thousand crowns more suffice to make him reject a lover who is to your mind? and is a young lady like you to be thrown away on a Limousin? If he wants to marry, why does he not choose a Limousine, and leave Christians alone? . . . We will play him so many tricks, and put such rogues upon him, that we will soon send him back to Limoges.

The aspersions here cast upon Limoges have been attributed to a cold reception given Molière when he was a strolling player, as well as to the fact that his brother-in-law, Geneviève Béjart's husband, hailed from that city. In any event, there is little malice in the attack, for Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, the Limousin, is the one sympathetic character in the comedy. A credulous countryman with gawky manners wishing to pass for a gentleman, he has at least the merit of being honest. The tricks whereby his life in Paris is made unbearable follow each other with whirlwind rapidity, until, accused by Nérine and an accomplice — the one simulating a Picarde, the other a Gasconne — of being the long lost husband of each, he disguises himself in female attire to escape being hanged for bigamy. Being arrested by a policeman whose venal proclivities have a decidedly modern aspect, he buys his freedom, and is glad to escape from so malevolent a city as

Paris, even though he returns alone to Limoges, and leaves his bride that was to be to wed a triumphant rival.

The most amusing pranks played upon this trustful provincial occur, however, in the first act, when Éraste delivers him into the hands of a pair of doctors with the assurance that he is a maniacal invalid. The character of one of these medical men is thus drawn by his apothecary:

He is a man who knows his profession as thoroughly as I know my catechism, and who, were his patient to die for it, would not depart one iota from the rules prescribed by the ancients. Yes, he always follows the highroad, and doesn't think it mid-day at fourteen o'clock. For all the gold in the world he would not cure a patient with other remedies than those prescribed by the Faculty. . . . He is not one of those doctors who prolong their patients' complaints, but he is expeditious, and despatches his "cases" promptly. If you must die, he is the man to help you to do it quickly.

Poor Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is prescribed for by this worthy as follows:

First, to cure this obdurate plethora and this luxuriant cacochymy throughout the body, I am of opinion that he should be liberally phlebotomised; that is to say, he should be bled frequently and copiously, first, at the basilic vein, then at the cephalic vein, and, if the disease be obstinate, the vein in the forehead should be opened, with an opening so large that the thick blood may come out. At the same time he should be purged, deobstructed, and evacuated by proper, suitable purgatives, that is, by cholagogues, melanogogues, et cætera; for since the real source of all the evil is either a gross and feculent humour, or a black and thick vapour, which obscures, infects, and contaminates the animal spirits, it

is proper that he should afterwards take a bath of soft, clean water, with plenty of whey, to purify, by the water, the feculence of the gross humours, and to clear, by the whey, the blackness of this vapour.

Should the miserable patient survive this treatment, a second doctor was ready to order "blood lettings and purgatives in odd numbers (*numero deus impare gaudet*)," and command a small clyster to serve as a prelude "to those judicious remedies, from which, if he is to be cured at all, he ought to receive relief." All this was but an exordium to the ballet interlude danced and sung to Lully's measures, wherein the poor victim is pursued by a number of doctors and apothecaries, each armed with a huge syringe: a scene by far the most suggestive in a comedy rather too indelicate for the present day, though one of the sprightliest Molière ever penned.

These continued attacks upon the Faculty brought forth a quasi-defender of the craft in Le Boulanger de Chalussay, the title of whose play, *Élomire hypocondre ou les Médecins vengés*,[1] may be translated as meaning *Molière, the Imaginary Invalid.* "I believe I am ill," says Elomire, a character whose name is an anagram of *Molière*, "and he who believes he is ill, is ill." After patronising the charlatans of the Pont Neuf, Élomire finally falls into the hands of three doctors whose prescriptions so terrify him that he whispers to his servant, "They make me so afraid, I think of dying," — a remark which calls forth

[1] This play, which was published in 1670, has already been quoted in previous chapters for statements bearing upon Molière's life. See pages 9, 16, 19, 86, and 290. Although purporting to avenge the doctors, they are, in reality, satirised almost as severely in this comedy as in Molière's own plays.

this timely advice: "Dream of getting well. Some day you can make a comedy of your experiences."

Indeed, some two years after Chalussay's play was published, Molière wrote *The Imaginary Invalid* (*Le Malade imaginaire*), a comedy in which many writers have seen a travesty by the author upon himself. Molière was too ill, however, to paint himself as an imaginary invalid, therefore it is more reasonable to see in his play a final shaft aimed at the physicians who had proved so incapable of arresting the ravages of a disease soon destined to prove fatal. Argan, our poet's hypochondriac, there exclaims:

> Your Molière is an impudent fellow with his comedies, and I think he might show better taste than to put such honest men as doctors on the stage . . . If I were one of them, I should be revenged for his impertinence, and if ever he fell ill, I 'd let him die without professional assistance. Whatever he might say or do, I would not order him the smallest blood letting. I 'd say to him, "Die! die! that will teach you, once for all, not to ridicule the Faculty."

These lines proved an augury. *The Imaginary Invalid* was produced on the tenth of February, 1673, and at its fourth performance the author was seized with hæmorrhage while playing the title rôle, and died a few hours later, — a calamity in which the physicians saw a heavenly vengeance for the insults heaped upon them.

The principal character in this, the last of Molière's medical satires, is Argan, a hypochondriac, whose obsession that he is suffering from a complication of serious maladies is humoured by Béline, his designing second wife, with the hope that physic will eventually make her husband's worldly goods her heritage. The action turns

upon the efforts of Cléante, an enterprising lover, to frustrate Argan's intention of marrying his daughter Angélique to a physician's son, in which purpose the young man is aided and abetted by a maid-of-all-work named Toinette, — by far the most pert and quick-witted of the author's many captivating soubrettes.

In the opening scene the hypochondriac is discovered checking his apothecary's accounts, and after we have listened to an enumeration of the doses of catholicon, rhubarb, cassia, and senna to which the poor man has been subjected, the wonder is that he is still alive. His chief concern, however, lies in the discovery that he is not so well as formerly, because he has not consumed as much medicine as during the previous month, — an oversight Monsieur Purgon, his physician, must remedy.

From Toinette this imaginary invalid learns he is "the milch cow" of his doctor and apothecary; and when he informs his daughter Angélique that she is to be given in marriage to a doctoral son of a doctor, the maid's impudent tongue wags freely. "What!" she says, "with all your wealth would you marry your daughter to a doctor?" "I want a medical son-in-law," Argan replies, "so that I may have in my own household the source of all the necessary remedies, consultations, and prescriptions," — a design his entire family, with the exception of his wife, conspires to frustrate. Angélique's admirer, Cléante, is smuggled into the house disguised as a music teacher to make love under Argan's very nose, but is unmasked through the naïve disclosures of the latter's little daughter, Louison, whereupon Toinette comes to the rescue. Disguised as a physician, she ingratiates herself into her master's good graces by prescribing new remedies, and proposes that he shall feign

death in order to discover the true feelings of his family, — a ruse conceived for the purpose of exposing Béline, a sort of female Tartuffe, who has been abetting her husband's folly with a view to robbing him. When this hypocrite appears, being told that her husband has just expired, she exclaims :

Heaven be praised! now I am delivered of a great load . . . what use was he when on earth? A man burdensome to all around, — a dirty, disgusting creature, ever blowing his nose, coughing, or spitting.

Before she can carry out her base purpose of seizing his papers and money, the supposed dead man springs to his feet, — a resurrection which causes the false wife to flee in terror from the house. When the same stratagem is used upon Angélique, Argan learns the difference between real and assumed affection. Hearing his grief-stricken daughter swear compliance with his last wishes regarding her marriage, the overjoyed hypochondriac consents to her union with Cléante on condition that he become a physician, — a proviso modified by his brother Béralde's suggestion that Argan himself take up that profession.

A ballet interlude in the shape of a mock ceremony whereby Argan is given his degree by a band of pseudo-physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries concludes the play, — a whimsical bit of humour, which, in the words of M. Raynaud, "must be considered not only as an abridgment of doctoral ceremonies, but of all those through which a candidate passes from the commencement of his studies until the day when he receives the doctor's cap."

This famous scene was devised, according to the same authority, in Mme. de la Sablière's salon after a

bohemian supper at which Boileau, La Fontaine, and Ninon de Lenclos were present, Boileau providing the macaronic Latin, and "two or three more or less sceptical doctors of Molière's set" the technical expressions. However, to quote M. Mesnard, "one cannot believe in the preciseness of the terms in which this story is told," since Monchesnay,[1] the authority from whom it is derived, places the scene in the salon of Ninon de Lenclos.

The Imaginary Invalid fairly bristles with satire aimed at the Faculty. For instance, when Argan asserts that Monsieur Purgon, his doctor, has an "income of eight thousand good livres," Toinette exclaims that "he must have killed a great many men to be as rich as that." Again, in a scene wherein Dr. Diafoirus comes to introduce his son Thomas to Angélique, his intended bride, the illiberality of the Faculty receives many a telling thrust. "What pleases me most in him," the elder Diafoirus exclaims regarding his son's talents, "is that he follows my example by blindly accepting the opinions of the ancients without seeking to understand or listen to reason and experience regarding the pretended discoveries of our century in respect to the circulation of the blood and other opinions of a like nature." The elder Diafoirus, too, exposes the chicanery of his craft when he exclaims that "it is easy to deal with the populace because you are responsible for your actions to none, and, provided you follow the current of the rules of your art, you need not be uneasy; but the vexatious part of treating people of quality is that when they fall ill, they absolutely demand that their physicians cure them."

Bolæana.

The most uncompromising attack upon medicine occurs, however, in a long and, it must be confessed, tedious scene, in which Argan's brother, Béralde, expounds the author's own views in the following manner :

Between ourselves, I consider medicine one of the greatest follies of mankind ; and to look philosophically at things, I do not know a more amusing mummery, nor do I see anything more ridiculous than for one man to undertake to cure another. . . . The springs of our machine are a mystery, of which, up to the present time, men have seen nothing ; since nature has placed too thick a veil before our eyes for us to know anything about it. . . . Most of the doctors have a deal of classical learning, know how to speak in good Latin, can name all the diseases in Greek, define and classify them ; but as regards curing them they know nothing at all.

This sounds like a wail from Molière's own heart. Indeed, each of his medical comedies represents a phase of his incurable malady. *Love as a Doctor*, so bitter in tone, was written when the disease first manifested itself. After nature had won a temporary triumph, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* was penned to paint in a vein of pleasantry the impotence of medicine ; then continued suffering the physicians were unable to alleviate inspired those more stinging satires, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *The Imaginary Invalid*, — each an expression of the author's bitterness toward medicine. In this connection M. Larroumet speaks pertinently :

Among the causes of hypochondria, stomach troubles stand pre-eminent, then extreme sensitiveness, moral preoccupations, a life of overwork. Are not all these united in Molière? The hypochondriac professes either exaggerated confidence in medicine or absolute scepticism

toward it, often commencing with the one only to finish with the other; but, sceptical or confiding, he concerns himself greatly with medicine, reading medical works with avidity or seeking to draw doctors into conversation. After the general practitioner he must have the specialist, then the advertiser, finally the charlatan. Molière seems to have passed through each of these different stages of the disease. To make doctors speak and behave as he does, he must have seen some of all classes, while to discourse about the medicine of his time so accurately as to call forth the admiration of Maurice Raynaud, he must have studied it at close range.[1]

The Imaginary Invalid bears witness to the truth of this in its half credulous, half sceptical view of medicine; for Argan is one phase of Molière's self, Béralde another. It was written to amuse the King, but a quarrel with Lully over the musical features made it first see the stage at the Palais Royal. Lully, having obtained an operatic monopoly from his Majesty, grew arrogant and dictatorial; so Molière called in Charpentier, another composer, to write the ballet interludes, with the result that Louis took Lully's part; hence, in writing his last play, our poet experienced the proverbial ingratitude of kings.

Though death was breaking his "vital chain," this comedy shows no diminution in Molière's mastery of his art. Argan is a world character, Toinette and Béline each a familiar type, — the one of feminine craft and impudence, the other of heartless policy; while Purgon and the Diafoiruses, father and son, shorn of their fur-trimmed gowns, stand revealed as academic snobs such as obtain wherever doctoral caps adorn dull heads.

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

Again the word "farce" dies on one's lips, for although this masterful play is replete with exaggeration and drollery, no truer characters ever graced a comedy. Who has not known a peevish invalid; a crafty step-mother; or a pompous, pragmatical physician, prescribing "according to the rules"? As a page of human life, *The Imaginary Invalid* is excelled only by *The Misanthrope* and *The Hypocrite.* As an immortal type, Argan the hypochondriac ranks beside Monsieur Jourdain the upstart gentleman and Harpagon the miser, — a proof that the light of Molière's genius burned undimmed to the last.

XVI

MOLIÈRE AND HIS FRIENDS

In the days when domestic troubles were ripening, generous friendships were Molière's solace; long before the rupture with his wife drove him to seek an asylum at Auteuil, he had been in the habit of meeting a few congenial spirits such as Chapelle, La Fontaine and Racine at Boileau's apartment in the rue du Colombier. Moreover, such taverns as the White Sheep and the Lorraine Cross rang to the laughter of this gathering of genius; but Molière was no such tippler as Chapelle, and appears to have exercised a sobering influence during more than one bohemian carouse. In all French literary history there is no coterie more gifted than the one which habitually assembled under Boileau's roof; yet it was not without dissension, for Racine's friendship "was apparently a shade that follows wealth or fame."

When this most classic of French dramatic poets first met Molière, he was fresh from his religious training at Port Royal, yet he does not appear to have been well grounded in principles of moral rectitude; after making his début as a professional versifier by an ode on the King's marriage, he became a dramatist and played our poet a trick so scurvy that even his apologists seek excuses in vain. Moreover, while his Jansenist friends were praying for his lost soul, he was writing facetious letters to his friend the Abbé le Vasseur in mockery of the religious doings at Port Royal, — a piece of ingratitude quite in keeping with his treatment of Molière.

He met the manager of the Palais Royal some time previous to the year 1663 and induced him to present *The Thebaïd*, his first tragedy. Furthermore, the young man was paid what we now call "advanced royalties," and there is considerable evidence indicating that Molière edited his manuscript in order to make it suitable for the stage. Although *The Thebaïd* was played only a few times and to small receipts, he produced *Alexander*, the young dramatist's next tragedy, on December fourth, 1665; yet when the new piece had attained a considerable success, Racine, regardless of Molière's kindness to an unknown author, surreptitiously placed it in rehearsal at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and, despite the unwritten law of the day that a play until printed was the property of the troupe first presenting it, *Alexander* was given there on December eighteenth without warning to the management of the Palais Royal. Racine's sole excuse for this shabby behaviour was dissatisfaction with the interpretation Molière's players had given his tragedy.

In his *Register* La Grange says, "the troupe believing that after having treated them so badly as to have given and taught other actors his play, it owed no author's royalties to the said M. Racine, the said author's royalties were divided, each of the twelve actors receiving his share," — a piece of retributive justice no one can gainsay; yet Molière was so magnanimous as to defend his young rival's comedy *The Pleaders* (*Les Plaideurs*). "This comedy is excellent," he exclaimed, "and those who ridicule it deserve to be ridiculed themselves"; [1] yet even to Molière's courtesy there was a limit, for, not content with taking his tragedy to the Hôtel de Bourgogne,

[1] *Mémoires sur la vie de Jean Racine* by Louis Racine, the poet's son.

Racine made love to the Italian beauty Thérèse de Gorla du Parc and induced her to desert Molière's forces during the Easter closing of his theatre (1667), — a last straw, it would seem, for thereafter Molière severed all friendly relations with the younger poet. Indeed, about a year thereafter, *The Foolish Quarrel; or, The Criticism of Andromacha* (*La Folle querelle ou la Critique d'Andromaque*) by one Subligny was placed upon the stage of the Palais Royal, — a play, as its title suggests, satirising Racine. To quote M. Mesnard, "as a plate of vengeance it was not served very hot; moreover, it was very badly cooked and without sufficient salt";[1] yet, as this same writer adds, "one likes to think that Molière did not wish to wage a more wicked war."

Although Racine's Alexandrines are the noblest in French dramatic poetry, his treatment of Molière can only be described as base; yet Boileau could not have remained his friend through life had he been so contemptible a man as his behaviour on this occasion would indicate. This most independent critic of his day was wont to bestow his praise wherever due, his censure whenever merited; yet despite the quarrel which separated Molière and Racine, he retained the friendship of both poets until death had silenced their lyres. His judgment of their achievements, too, was discriminating, his friendship valiant; for when *The School for Wives* was attacked so viciously by the critics for its supposed impiety, he became Molière's defender; yet he was equally sincere in condemning his actor friend for allying himself with Tabarin.[2]

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière.*

[2] On the occasion of the production of *The Rascalities of Scapin.* See page 352.

Boileau's acquaintance with Racine dates from 1664, and, to quote Professor Crane, "it ripened into the most perfect friendship known in the annals of literary history";[1] yet he was equally the confidant of Molière. Indeed, each poet found in him an ardent admirer and impartial critic; for in judging their works his acumen was singularly discriminating. Although his friendship with Racine was perhaps deeper than his regard for Molière, when asked by the King what great writer had most honoured his reign, he did not hesitate to answer, "Molière, sire." "I think not," Louis replied; "but you know better than I,"[2]—at once a tribute to the judgment of Boileau and of posterity.

In view of the confession of faith made in his ninth satire, it is not surprising to find Boileau so ardent an admirer of Molière. "Nothing is beautiful but the truth," he there exclaims; "the truth alone is lovable!" Moreover, Brossette asserts that Boileau was the declared enemy of everything which offends reason, nature, or truth."[3] Where could he have found a more valiant defender of his creed than in the great apostle of dramatic truth?

Boileau, too, showed scant mercy toward such affected poets as Chapelain, Quinault, and Cotin, and he held that the novels Mlle. de Scudéry "gave birth to each month, were artless, languishing writings seemingly shaped in spite of good sense,"[4]—a stricture upon

[1] *Les Héros de roman.*

[2] Louis Racine tells this anecdote in his *Mémoires*, and as Molière is awarded the palm over his father, there should be little doubt regarding its truth.

[3] *Bolæana.*

[4] Boileau's second satire, dedicated to Molière.

bad taste and affectation clearly evincing a mind capable of appreciating Molière's sane philosophy of life. Still, it was almost in spite of himself that he admired the actor poet above all other writers of his day; for he was unable to see that the homely logic of Sganarelle was as true as the exalted philosophy of Alceste. Moreover, Molière was too thoroughly a friend of the people to suit Boileau's taste, too disregardful of the dignity of his art for the critic to pardon his friend's persistence in continuing on the stage after he had become a poet of the first magnitude.

In this connection Brossette[1] tells an anecdote clearly illustrating Boileau's views. It appears that a short time before Molière's death the two friends indulged in an amicable dispute inspired by a fear on the critic's part that Molière was leading too strenuous a life for a man in his physical condition. After arguing with his overworked friend upon the necessity of retiring from the stage for the sake of his health, Boileau thus adjured him:

"Content yourself with writing and leave the acting to one of your comrades. This will make you more respected by the public, who will consider your actors as your supernumeraries. Moreover, the players themselves, none too submissive to you now, will better feel your superiority."

Molière's answer shows at once the man of overwrought nerves and the actor "whose advantage is applause":

"Ah, my dear sir, how can you speak so! It is a point of honour with me not to give up."

Boileau saw the futility of arguing with one so wedded

[1] *Bolæana.*

to the footlights; his own feelings are shown in the reflections he made at the moment:

A pretty point of honour, indeed, to blacken his face daily to produce the moustache of Sganarelle and give his back to all the beatings of comedy! What, this man, in perception and true philosophical feeling the first of our time, this ingenious censor of all human follies, cherishes one greater than any he ridicules daily! That thoroughly shows how little men amount to after all.

In the republic of letters Boileau was a censorious patrician, Molière the people's tribune; hence the one could not understand that the hearty laughter of the pit, far more than the supercilious smile of the courtier seated on the stage, told the other that he had revealed true human nature. It was a point of honour with Molière not to give up, because he was at once the public's idol and its slave, — an actor living for the hand claps, a poet whose Parnassus was the stage, though his muse dwelt in the surging pit. Love of the theatre was in his blood, and he could no more give up while the breath of life was in him than Boileau, the haughty critic, could have bared his back to those beatings of comedy. His actor friend was the author of *The Misanthrope;* so Boileau condoned, but did not pardon him, the crime of being a *farceur*. He knew the depth, but failed to see the breadth, of his genius.

A friend of a different cloth was Claude-Emmanuel Chapelle, the comrade of Molière's youth. A natural son of François Luillier, *maître des comptes*, this epicurean roisterer and dilettante poet took his name from La Chapelle St. Denis, his birthplace. Being legitimised at the age of sixteen, upon his father's death in 1652 he

inherited a considerable fortune, whereupon he gave himself over completely to a life of pleasure, divided about equally between society and vice. In the fashionable world he was well received, but he never sacrificed an hour of amusement for a social engagement.

Once when pressed by the Duc de Brissac to pay a visit to his family seat, Chapelle left Paris in company with his Grace, but happening to dine at Augers with a canon of his acquaintance, he chanced upon these words in a copy of Plutarch, "He who follows the great becomes a slave"; whereupon he left the duke to pursue his way alone. On another occasion, having an engagement to dine with the great Condé, he took a stroll before the appointed hour, and chancing upon some pall-mall players he was invited to settle a disputed point. His decision was so just that they asked him to sup with them,—an invitation which made him forget his promise to the prince. "In truth, your Highness," he said in excuse, "the people who invited me to supper were worthy folk and they knew thoroughly well how to live."

An incorrigible votary of Bacchus, Chapelle was locked up at the age of twenty in a correctionary prison. Bachaumont, the collaborator of his youth, forsook dissipation for matrimony, and astonished his friends by proclaiming that "an honest man ought to live at the door of a church and die in the sacristy"; but Chapelle never forswore the doctrine that pleasure is the highest good. His fondness for the wine cup was indeed a source of anxiety to his friends. On one occasion Boileau, meeting him in the street, reproached him for this failing. "I have resolved to reform," Chapelle replied, "I feel the truth of your arguments"; then, suggesting

that if they entered a neighbouring tavern they might finish their talk undisturbed, the wretch filled Boileau's glass so frequently that his temperance advocacy ended in intoxication.[1]

Molière's intimacy with Chapelle began when they were both students of Gassendi, the epicurean; yet the dramatist was no such disciple of pleasure as his dissolute comrade. Indeed their friendship was apparently due to that contrariety in taste which occasionally brings strong, opposing natures into intimate relations. In 1667 they rented an apartment together in a country house at Auteuil from one Jacques de Grou, sieur de Beaufort, where Molière resided until he became reconciled to his wife,[2] but Chapelle was only a periodical visitor. In the words of Grimarest:[3]

The friendship they formed at college continued until the last moment; yet Chapelle was not a comforting friend. He was too dissipated, and, although he loved truly, he was not capable of fulfilling those assiduous duties which awaken friendship. He had, however, an apartment in Molière's house at Auteuil, but it was more for the purpose of making merry than for leading a serious life.

"Not only a good actor, but an excellent author, Molière took care," according to this same authority, "to cultivate philosophy," and in argument with Chapelle took the side of Descartes in opposition to Gassendi's doctrines. Although Chapelle was sincere, "this quality was often founded on false principles, from

[1] *Mémoires* by Louis Racine.

[2] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière* by Jules Loiseleur.

[3] Fairly trustworthy as an authority for the events of Molière's later years.

which he could not be reclaimed. Wishing to offend no one, he could not, however, resist the pleasure of speaking his mind or of passing a witticism at the expense of his friends."

Chapelle was vain, too, being accused of boasting that he had written the best part of Molière's phantasy, *The Bores;* but their relations were not chilled thereby, and whenever he left Paris to visit friends in the country it was his pleasure to send Molière succulent pasties baked expressly for him, — a tangible argument in favour of epicurean truth.

Grimarest tells an amusing anecdote of Chapelle in his cups, which well illustrates Molière's tact, — a quality so necessary to a theatrical manager. Chapelle, it appears, returning from Auteuil in his habitual state of intoxication, insisted upon making a favourite servant, invariably accorded the privilege of riding on the seat beside him, descend and mount the footman's platform. The man, accustomed to his master's habits, took this command as a mere drunken caprice with the result that Chapelle began to pommel him for his disobedience. The coachman was obliged to descend and separate the belligerents, whereupon the offending servant fled, pursued by his irate master. Molière, luckily a witness of the scene, came to the rescue and was appealed to as arbiter, Chapelle maintaining that his rascally servant had usurped a seat in his carriage, and the culprit that he had been privileged to ride with his master for fully thirty years. The poet's judgment was worthy of Solomon. "You were wrong," he told the valet, "to be disrespectful to your master; therefore I condemn you to mount behind his carriage and ride to the end of the meadow. There you will politely beg his permission

to enter the vehicle, — a boon I feel sure he will grant." "Egad, Molière," cried Chapelle, "I am greatly obliged to you, for the affair was embarrassing. Good-bye, my dear friend; you judge better than any man in France."

Another of Molière's friends whose vagaries must be attributed to genius was La Fontaine the fabulist, — a man whose utter indifference to the obligations and restraints of life was the distinguishing feature of his character. To his lasting credit he adhered nobly in the hour of disgrace to Fouquet, the man whose bounty he had enjoyed; yet he was the spoiled child of Molière's literary circle, where he was affectionately addressed as *le bonhomme*. So absent minded that he would sit for hours at a time in a state of abstraction, he became the object of many jests; and on one occasion Racine and Boileau bantered him so cruelly that Molière, taking a friend into a corner, exclaimed, "Our fine wits may frisk as much as they please, but they will never efface our good fellow there!" [1] a demonstration of prescience on the dramatist's part, since La Fontaine, next to himself, is now considered the most original genius of that age. Boileau, however, ignored the fabulist in his criticisms, being doubtless unable to recognise that by adorning fable with the beauties of poetry his absent minded friend had created a new branch of literature.

La Fontaine was as simple in evil as in good, and is reputed never to have told a lie in all his life; yet in spite of this admirable quality, he was apparently without moral sense. Without any tangible reason except tedium, he lived apart from his wife; and at one time Boileau and Racine, attempting a reconciliation, persuaded him to make the journey to Château-Thierry,

[1] *Histoire de l'Académie françoise depuis* 1652 *jusqu'à* 1700 by Olivet.

where his wife resided, with an olive branch in his hand. Learning that she was at vespers when he arrived, the fabulist went to sup with some friends, and was passed on from house to house during the bad weather which followed, until he was obliged to return to Paris to attend a meeting of the Academy without having seen his unfortunate spouse.

He could fill the rôle of boon companion, however, and apparently he was a leading spirit in the remarkable literary club which met in Boileau's apartment. In his introduction to *The Loves of Psyche and Cupid* (*Les Amours de Psyché et Cupidon*) he has left a charming pen sketch of this coterie of geniuses:

Four friends whose acquaintance began upon Parnassus formed a kind of club which I would call an academy had their number been larger and had they possessed as much regard for the Muses as for pleasure. The first thing they did was to banish formal conversation and everything that savoured of academic discussion. When they were met together, and had talked sufficiently about their amusements, if chance led them to touch upon any question of science or literature, they profited by the opportunity, yet invariably without dwelling too long on any one subject, flying off purposely to another like bees who meet divers flowers on their way. Envy, malice, or intrigue found no voice among them. They adored the works of the ancients, yet did not refuse to those of the moderns such praise as was their due, speaking of their own performances with modesty, and giving each other honest advice whenever one of their number chanced to be seized with the malady of the age and wrote a book, — an event which rarely happened.

Admitting that Polyphide (the name under which he introduces himself) was the greatest offender in this

respect, La Fontaine adds that Acante (Racine) "did not fail according to custom to propose a walk," while, "of the two friends whom I shall call Ariste and Gélaste, the first was serious without being discomforting and the other extremely gay."

Ariste was Boileau, and Gélaste Molière, until his quarrel with Racine brought "envy, malice, and intrigue" into that charmed circle, when the name Gélaste was used to indicate Chapelle.[1] Upon Molière's retirement to his asylum at Auteuil, he, instead of Boileau, was the most serious member of the Parnassian coterie described by La Fontaine; for, despite his quarrel with Racine, his relations with the other intellects of that charmed circle remained unaltered. Moreover, he was not permitted to live in his retreat unmolested, as an amusing anecdote well testifies.

It appears that one day Chapelle, Boileau, and a number of Molière's gay friends went to Auteuil, uninvited, boldly announcing that they had come to supper.

"I would have been more pleased," said the dramatist, "were it possible for me to keep you company, but the state of my health will not permit it. I leave to M. Chapelle the duty of entertaining you."

What a picture of Alceste in his desert Molière's words convey! Too ill to entertain his friends, he was forced to drink his milk and leave them to carouse under the leadership of Chapelle.

"Egad, I'm a great fool," said that epicurean, "to come here every day and get drunk for the honour of Molière; but what provokes me most is that he believes I am obliged to do it."

Molière was right in this conjecture. At three in the

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière* by Paul Mesnard.

morning, with the poet's wine singing in his veins, Chapelle preached a cynical sermon to his maudlin comrades:

"Life is but a trifle, replete with obstacles. For thirty or forty years we lie in wait for a moment of pleasure we never meet. Our youth is tormented by wretched parents who wish us to cram our heads with a heap of nonsense. I don't care a hang whether the earth or the sun turns, whether that fool Descartes or that madman Aristotle is right. I once had a crazy teacher who told that twaddle to me over and over again and kept me for ever falling back on Epicurus. Once more, pass that philosopher by. He was the one who knew the most. No sooner are we rid of such fools than our ears are deafened with talk about a domestic establishment. All women are but animals, the sworn enemies of our tranquillity. Yes, egad, there is nothing in life but trouble, injustice, and misfortune."

Upon hearing this discourse, one of Chapelle's drunken companions embraced him fondly and exclaimed:

"You are right, my dear friend; without the pleasure here, what should we do? Life is a poor lot. Let us leave it, and for fear that such good friends as we may be separated, let us drown ourselves together. The river is at the door."

"True," said another, "we can never choose a better time to die happy and good friends; moreover, our death will create some noise"; whereupon the whole melancholically merry company staggered to the river bank and were just entering a boat with a view to throwing themselves into deep water, when Moliere, awakened by young Baron, his house guest, reached the water's edge with his servants in the nick of time, for some of his

friends were already floundering in the Seine. Upon being dragged ashore, these wretches drew their swords and chased their rescuers back to Auteuil, where the most persistent advocate of self destruction thus admonished his host:

"I say, my dear Molière, you are clever. Judge if we are wrong. Weary of the troubles of this world, and in order to be better off, we resolved to enter another. The river appeared the shortest route, but those rascally servants of yours blocked it. Can we do less than chastise them?"

"How was it possible, gentlemen, for you to conceive so noble a project without letting me share it?" Molière exclaimed, after upbraiding his servants for preventing the fulfilment of so praiseworthy a design. "What, you would drown yourselves without me? I thought you were better friends of mine than that."

"He's deuced right;" cried Chapelle, "we did him great injustice." Then, turning to his host, he continued with drunken fervour, "Come, then, and drown yourself with us."

"Softly," said Molière, "this is not an affair to be undertaken in an unseemly manner. It is the last act of our life and it must not be lacking in dignity. If we drown ourselves at this hour, the world would be mean enough to speak ill of it; people would surely say that we did it at night like desperate men or like a lot of drunkards; so let us choose the moment most worthy of our action, the moment which will reflect the most honour upon ourselves. To-morrow, between eight and nine in the morning, when still fasting, we will jump head first in the river before the whole world."

Molière's proposition was received with unanimous approbation, one of the members of this tipsy suicide club exclaiming that "Moliere always has a hundred times more sense than the rest of us," but naturally death appeared less attractive in the cold grey light of the morrow.

This famous incident, equal in its comedy to any of Molière's own conceptions, is known as the Auteuil supper. The dialogue is taken, verbatim, from Grimarest's account, — an abused authority, which in this instance is corroborated; for Louis Racine, in his memoirs of his father, tells a similar story of this famous incident, which though "unbelievable," as he declares, "is thoroughly true." "Fortunately," he continues, "his father was not there," although "the wise Boileau" was one of the party and "lost his senses like the rest."

Molière's friends were not all roisterers, however. In the more serious affairs of life he turned for advice and countenance to Jacques Rohault, the Cartesian, to whom he unburdened his heart regarding his domestic trials by exclaiming so bitterly: "Yes, my dear Monsieur Rohault, I am the most unhappy of all men." This sceptic and philosopher was a fervent expounder of the doctrines of Descartes, and doubtless his influence made the poet forswear the epicurean teachings of Gassendi for the principle that "Truth requires a clear and distinct conception of its object, excluding all doubt"; for in his dramatic work, so truthful in conception, so clear in treatment, Molière reflects to a considerable degree this Cartesian postulate. Furthermore, Grimarest tells a story of a boat ride on the Seine during which Chapelle and Molière indulged in a violent philosophical argument upon the relative merits of Gassendi and Descartes, with

a Minim as arbiter, — an incident noteworthy as further evidence of Molière's Cartesian leanings.

Grimarest asserts that Rohault served as model for the philosopher in *The Burgher, a Gentleman*, adding that Molière, wishing to make the likeness unmistakable, sent Baron to borrow a peculiar old hat which Rohault invariably wore. The emissary, however, by telling the purpose for which it was intended, failed to obtain the desired object, since the philosopher, in the words of the chronicler, " would have felt himself dishonoured had his head-dress appeared upon the stage." Upon another occasion Rohault played a part in no way philosophical; yet, as the event presents Molière in a new and favourable manner, the digression its recountal demands should be pardonable. It concerns the elder Jean Poquelin's none too scrupulous accounting as executor of his first wife's estate, and Molière's charitableness when his father became involved in financial difficulties toward the close of his life.

According to his mother's will, the poet inherited five thousand livres, and, before he left Paris, his father had paid him, or advanced to settle his debts, about a thousand livres of this amount. During the next few years he must have received additional sums; for in April, 1651, he gave his father a written acknowledgment for the receipt of nineteen hundred and sixty-five livres, all told; while between 1660 and 1664 Poquelin senior advanced his son various sums aggregating fifteen hundred and twelve livres seven sous, which Molière declared upon his father's death were not a debt to the estate. When all these various amounts are taken into account, it is apparent, according to M. Eudore Soulié,[1]

[1] *Recherches sur Molière.*

that there was an unpaid balance from his mother's estate due Molière, at the time of his father's death, of more than fifteen hundred livres; and in view of this state of affairs the poet's generosity toward his father appears exceedingly meritorious, for, although Jean Poquelin senior was apparently his debtor, Molière loaned the upholsterer in 1668 the sum of ten thousand livres, without interest, for the purpose of repairing the parental house in the arcades of the market-place. Moreover, to hide his identity as benefactor, he made use of the name of his friend Jacques Rohault the philosopher, — a fact made apparent only after Molière's death by his widow's discovery of the papers in the case.

Jean Poquelin senior died February twenty-fifth, 1669, at the age of seventy-three, leaving a number of debts for his son to pay; and M. Soulié maintains that during the last years of his life he was "a morose old man, and somewhat of a miser," who "rejected the offers of help his son doubtless made him on several occasions until Molière was forced finally to hide his identity when coming to his father's assistance." This loan to Jean Poquelin senior is not the only recorded instance of Molière's liberality, for Grimarest tells a story in which his bountifulness is made even more apparent.

It appears that an actor named Mondorge, whom the poet had known in his "barn storming" days, had fallen into penury. Young Baron, restored in 1670 to his benefactor's good graces, was staying at Auteuil when this indigent comedian appeared to seek Molière's assistance. Touched by the man's story of misfortune, he volunteered to act as intermediary.

"It is true," said Molière, when he had heard his

friend's account of Mondorge's ill luck, "that we once played comedy together. He is a most worthy man, and I am sorry his affairs are in such a state. How much do you think I ought to give him?"

Baron, considering four pistoles sufficient to enable Mondorge to join a travelling company, finally suggested that sum, whereupon Molière replied:

"Very well, I shall give him four pistoles for my part, since you consider it sufficient, but here are twenty more I shall add for you, in order that he may realise he is indebted to you for the service I have rendered him. I also have a theatrical costume I no longer need. Give it him — the poor man may find it useful in his profession."

This costume, it appears, was "almost new and had cost Molière twenty-five hundred livres," while the manner in which he received his poverty stricken comrade was in keeping with this generosity; for, once more to quote Grimarest, "he seasoned the present with the good welcome he gave Mondorge."[1]

Another anecdote characteristic of Molière's generous nature is told by the same writer. An honest beggar, it appears, returned a gold piece the poet had given him by mistake. "Keep it, my friend," Molière replied, "and here is another"; the open-handed giver adding philosophically, "where will Virtue next hide herself?"[2]

Among the few detached poems left by Molière are two animated by friendship. One, a eulogy called *The Glory of the Val-de-Grâce* (*La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce*), was inspired by a fresco depicting the glory of the

[1] As Baron, Grimarest's informant, figures in this story, its trustworthiness need not be seriously questioned.

[2] *Anonymiana, ou Mélanges de poésies, d'éloquence, et d'érudition.*

Blessed, painted by Pierre Mignard, to adorn the church of Val-de-Grâce which Anne of Austria had erected in the rue St. Jacques; the other was a sonnet written to console La Mothe le Vayer for the loss of his son.

The reader will recall the painter whose work inspired the longer of these poems as the dramatist's friend in the days when he toured the provinces. Although twelve years his senior, Mignard was Molière's life long confidant, and an intimate of the Béjarts as well; for he witnessed Geneviève's marriage contract, while Madeleine chose him as an executor for her estate. A book published in 1700 speaks of Molière as having "written *The Glory of the Val-de-Grâce* in favour of Monsieur Mignard whose daughter he loved"; but this young person was only sixteen when Molière died, and probably not more than eleven at the time his poem was composed, so it is needless to see in the poet's supposed affection for her another amour. Molière, however, fervently pleaded her father's cause with Colbert, to whom the painter was then *persona non grata*, and his apotheosis of Mignard's fresco is so laudatory that he has frequently been reproached for extravagantly commending a mediocre work of art; yet Boileau was equally excessive in his tribute to Molière's verses in saying that —

> Of all his works the poem he wrote in praise of his friend the famous Mignard is the most regular and sustained in its versification. . . . This poem . . . might pass for a complete treatise on painting, for the author has made all the rules of that admirable art appear in it.[1]

Molière's verses are well turned and graceful, it is true, yet the modern critic will be inclined to find these words

[1] *Récréations littéraires* by Cizeron Rival.

of praise quite as excessive as the apotheosis they extol. As an evidence, however, of the warmth and sincerity of Molière's friendship for Mignard, *The Glory of the Val-de-Grâce* is worthy of sincere commendation; and the same may be said of the sonnet inscribed to La Mothe le Vayer.

This sceptic and philosopher was Molière's senior by some thirty-four years; the son whose death inspired his pathetic lines, a churchman and writer of nearly his own age; and although his friendship for the father must have been rather in the nature of veneration, there is a tragic note in his poem which is almost prophetic; for only a few weeks later the man who so touchingly expressed paternal grief lost his own first born. This occurred in 1664, long before the quarrel with his wife and his retirement to Auteuil; but the affecting sonnet to La Mothe le Vayer, written before death and domestic misery had saddened his own life, shows that he possessed "the noble heart and beautiful mind" he attributes to his friend's dead son.

In 1667, at the time of his retirement to Auteuil, Molière became so ill that he was obliged to leave the stage for two months; but the quiet of a suburban village so restored his health that soon he was able to interfere in a quarrel wherein a choleric gardener was endeavouring to break the head of his master's son-in-law. Aided by his friends, the contumacious menial was locked in Molière's own room by the poet, whereupon the affair was made a case at law, Molière's name appearing, together with the details of the rumpus, in a *Jurisdiction seigneuriale*, dated August twenty-first and twenty-second, 1667.[1]

[1] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière* by Jules Loiseleur. *Pièce justificative* communicated by M. Parent de Rosan.

The apartment Molière rented in the Sieur de Beaufort's house at Auteuil for four hundred livres a year was, according to M. Loiseleur,[1] "extremely simple." Situated on the ground floor, it comprised a kitchen, a dining-room, and a bedroom, together with two attic rooms on the second floor. Molière possessed the right of "walking in the park," while for twenty *écus* a year additional rent he secured a bedroom in which to lodge his friends. In these modest quarters the poet dwelt during the years he remained separated from his wife, being visited from time to time by his many intimates, among whom remains to be mentioned Bernier, a former schoolmate who paid him a visit at Auteuil after returning from a long sojourn in the dominions of the Great Mogul.

The poet's household was in keeping with the modesty of his apartments. At the time of his death he was served by three domestics, — a cook, Renée Vannier, known as La Forest, Catherine Lemoyne, a housemaid, and Provençal, a manservant. The name of Molière's cook apparently remained a fixture, for one Louise Lefebvre, called La Forest, died in 1668, while Renée Vannier, her successor, received the same sobriquet.

One of these geniuses of the spit is the La Forest to whom Molière is reputed to have read his comedies with the assurance that her verdict would be sustained by the "gallery gods." Brossette, in recounting the anecdote, adds that "she had sufficient literary acumen not to confound Brécourt's work with Molière's," while, according to Grimarest, she accompanied her master to the theatre and evidently performed some trifling services there, for La Grange records a payment to her of three livres. Her laughter, too, welled heartily on the occasion when

[1] *Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière.*

the dramatist, acting the part of Sancho Panza, was forced by the perversity of the ass upon which he was mounted to make his entrance before his cue. Indeed, La Forest must have served as a model for Molière's pert servant characters, such as Dorine in *The Hypocrite* and Toinette in *The Imaginary Invalid.*

Grimarest states that the valet Provençal once received a kick from his master after having put on a stocking wrong side out, this writer adding that Molière "was the most exacting man in the world in the matter of being served," since "a window opened or closed a moment before he had ordered it threw him into a convulsion," all of which proves that his nerves were easily excited,—a characteristic of most great artists. As Provençal is reputed to have used a translation Molière had made of Lucretius as curling papers for his master's wig, the kick seems amply justified.[1] Indeed, much in the way of irritability may be pardoned a man of Molière's many occupations, for no one filling the varied rôles of actor, manager, and play writer could long maintain an equable temper. In answer to reproaches made by Chapelle upon his preoccupation, these heartfelt words are put into the poet's mouth by Grimarest:

Ah, my dear sir, you are really amusing. For you it is easy to devise this mode of life. You are isolated from everything; so you can, if you wish, think a fortnight over one witticism, without any one troubling you, and then go, well warmed with wine, to tell it everywhere

[1] M. Monval in *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière* quotes Tralage as saying that this manuscript was offered to a publisher by the poet's widow, who refused it on the ground that it was "too much opposed to the immortality of the soul." If this be so, it could not have been burnt by the valet.

at the expense of your friends, for you have nothing else to do. But if, like me, you were busy striving to please the King; if you had forty or fifty unreasonable people to support and direct, a theatre to maintain, and plays to write in order to ensure your reputation, on my word, you would not think of laughing, nor would you pay so much attention to your witticisms and jests, which, believe me, do not hinder you from making many enemies.

Molière was a dreamer who cared little for society,—"a contemplator," as Boileau called him, who preferred the companionship of a few intimates to the attentions of the many. Those whom he esteemed remained attached to him through life; for he who defined friendship with such conviction in *The Misanthrope* counted among his associates the most brilliant men and women of his day, —such as the great Condé, the Maréchal de Vivonne, Madame de la Sablière, and Ninon de Lenclos, whom Molière considered "the person of the great world upon whom humour made the quickest impression." He repaid all the dinners he received, but his function in society was apparently to observe; for De Vizé, in his comedy of *Zélinde*, makes a shopkeeper say of him:

Èlomire did not speak a word. I found him leaning on my counter in the attitude of a man who dreams. His eyes were glued upon two or three persons of quality who were bargaining for laces, and he appeared attentive to their conversation; for the movement of his eyes indicated that he was searching the depths of their souls for the things they did not say: I believe, however, he had a memorandum book and that, hidden by his cloak, he wrote down, unseen, the most pertinent things they said.

During the visits paid by his troupe to the houses of great nobles, Molière studied the manners and ways

of the company he entertained, but, as M. Larroumet exclaims: "That did not suffice. He must know his models in a more friendly and freer way; so he accepted their invitations."[1]

The author of *Zélinde* makes one of his characters invite Molière to meet "three or four sorry jesters," with the assurance that he "will not leave without the material for three or four comedies." Indeed Molière's habitual attitude in society was that of an observer, — a quality early made apparent by the stories told of his doings in Maître Gély's barber-shop at Pézenas. In *The Criticism of The School for Wives* he paints this pen picture of his own social diffidence:

You know the man and his natural laziness in sustaining a conversation. Célimène invited him to supper as a fine wit, yet never did he appear so embarrassed and stupid as among a dozen persons to whom she had lauded him and who stared at him as one who could not have been made of the same clay as themselves. They all thought he was there to regale the company with witticisms; that each word falling from his lips must be unusual; that he ought to compose an impromptu upon everything said, and never ask for a drink except with an epigram; but he deceived them cruelly with his silence.

Molière was too sincere to pose. Only to such life long friends as Chapelle, Mignard, Rohault, and Boileau did he unburden his heart. Once more to quote M. Larroumet, "In his treatment of his enemies, his rivals, his patrons, the men of rank, the King, we see a man honest and upright, yet compliant and cautious," — a man of the world, in short, skilfully using his knowledge

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

of human nature to win success in his chosen career, — a man too relentless in his hatred of imposture to temporise with hypocrites, too sincere to play the courtier, save as a means to gather material for his "ridiculous likenesses." For his morality and his views of life, one must turn to his plays. His subjective writings have already been dwelt upon, and he has been viewed as courtier and poet militant. In the comedies now to be considered he wrote objectively from material he had collected while playing the silent part of contemplator.

XVII

THE HISTRIONIC PLAYS

If a literary play is one in which the quality of the dialogue transcends the human interest of the story, a histrionic play is one befitting the stage, or, in the parlance of the dramatic profession, "a good acting piece." With rare exceptions, Molière's comedies are histrionic; hence the use of this word as a specific term demands some explanation.

Although slavishly transalpine in *The Blunderer*, it will be remembered that Molière became truly Gallic in *Les Précieuses ridicules* and militant in *The Hypocrite;* while, from time to time, as a courtier's stratagem to win the King's regard, he brought forth various trifling skits upon society. The comedies of his later years, however, neither militant nor obsequious in tone, abound in life-like characters and amusing situations. Penned at a time when Molière had exhausted his enthusiasm in futile attacks upon the vices of his day, these plays, Gallic in quality, Italian or even classic in conception, depict such failings as avarice and social ambition in a manner intended to call forth laughter rather than ill-will. Essentially eclectic in treatment, they are, above all, stage plays, conceived primarily to amuse an audience. With the exception of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *The Hypocrite*, *The Misanthrope*, and two of the militant satires directed against medicine, they are, of all Molière's

pieces, those most frequently seen to-day upon the French stage; therefore the word "histrionic" is no misnomer.

Were it not for their perennial ability to hold an audience, the majority of these histrionic comedies might readily be classed among the Gallic plays. *The Miser*, for instance, and *The Burgher, a Gentleman*, are certainly as national in tone as *Sganarelle*, yet, being penned during the later years of Molière's life, they are so thoroughly marked by the sure touch of a master craftsman that the term "histrionic" seems more fitting to distinguish this, the period when Molière, worldly wise, experienced as a manager, and less zealous as a crusader, was content to write plays well calculated to fill the coffers of his theatre.

In other words, the histrionic comedies are the work of a mature man glad to exchange a battered lance for a keen-pointed rapier, — a man, in short, who had learned the futility of tilting at windmills. His genius had not waned, but his zeal was tempered by experience. Only against the doctors did he ride in battle array, and even then in a way so half-hearted that death itself seemed no longer an enemy, but a friend he wished to meet.

No Tartuffe nor Alceste graces this histrionic period, but, on the other hand, there is no Don Garcia of Navarre. Chronologically such comedy ballets as *The Magnificent Lovers* and *Psyche* belong to it, but these are essentially court plays; moreover, the King suggested the topic for the one, while both Quinault and Corneille collaborated with Molière upon the other; so our poet is scarcely responsible for their failure to hold a modern audience. Molière's medical satires, too, though militant in tone, are so histrionic in treatment that they might readily be classed among the comedies of the later period.

The first play, however, to be considered, principally from the stage point of view, is *Amphitryon*, a three-act comedy in verse based upon Plautus's *Amphitruo*. The Latin farce upon which Molière's play founds itself is a ludicrous recountal of the visit of Jupiter to Alcmène in the guise of her lover Amphitryon. Molière's version is less vulgar in treatment and far better in construction than its model; yet palpably an imitation and dealing with a mythical subject, it affords a poor example of the author's surpassing gift of truthful portraiture.

The characters are Greek gods and fabulous mortals, but even when painting these mythological beings Molière could not entirely stifle his love of truth. Amphitryon's servant Sosie, and the latter's wife, Cléanthis, are quite as much of the soil of France as Sganarelle, the doctor in spite of himself, and Martine, his helpmate. From the modern point of view, *Amphitryon* would make a better *opera bouffe* than comedy; but Molière, like Plautus, wrote for the taste of his time, and, to quote Bayle, "there are subtleties and pranks in his *Amphitryon* which far surpass the raillery of its Latin prototype." This writer places *Amphitryon* among Molière's best plays,[1] — a judgment modern critics will be likely to challenge; still, though the subject is mythological and borrowed from a classic source, the play is a pleasing phantasy which conserves the wit of Latin comedy while charming by the luxuriance and gaiety of its language.

The sparkling quality of *Amphitryon* is enhanced by the varied metre of its verses. Here, for the first time, Molière discards the iambic hexameters of French dramatic poetry for *vers libres*, or lines of unequal measure, while the stately couplet gives place to a varied

[1] *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1697.

rhyme scheme. Had this freedom from classic despotism been declared in *The Hypocrite* or *The Misanthrope*, Molière would merit scant approval for his temerity; but in *Amphitryon*, a phantasy resembling in many ways the ballet interludes which had graced his previous comedies, this assertion of poetic license passes for delightful bravado.

The French Alexandrine, gliding upon its classic course like a mighty river of harmony, possesses a rhythmical grandeur with which no dramatic verse, except the Greek, can vie. In the use of this superb measure, so Latin in spirit that in English its majestic rhythm becomes mere resonance, Molière is inferior to Racine, not only because comedy lends itself less easily than tragedy to a metre so melodious, but because his sparkling genius demanded a form of expression at once crisp and succinct; even in his versified plays his characters speak the ordinary language of man.

In such comedies as *The Misanthrope*, high thoughts are embodied and pure emotions are rhythmically expressed; but imagery is almost entirely lacking. Molière, chafing in poetic harness, longed for a more laconic medium with which to colour his truthful portraits of mankind. Until his day verse had been the sole form permissible for both tragedy and comedy, yet defying the canons of French dramatic art, he forsook the rhythmical form of expression so frequently, that of his thirty-three existing plays only fourteen are in verse. Molière was a master of metrical technic, but his thoughts came freely and directly without the circumlocutory metaphors and similes which constitute poetic imagery. Only in this failure to embellish his noblest sentiments with vivid figures of speech is he inferior to Shake-

speare in the province of comedy. In fecundity, as M. Coquelin has so happily said, he is the great Englishman's equal; in veracity, his superior. Molière was a naturalist; his genius lay, above all else, in telling the plain truth about mankind, — prose was its normal vehicle. As a poet he has been surpassed, but never as a writer of concise, vigorous, and truthful prose dialogue, — a dialogue so expressive of human thoughts and human emotions that his characters are still as lifelike as on the day they were drawn.

The verses of *Amphitryon* which inspired this digression are at once so delicate and spirited that to many an Anglo-Saxon their free measure will appear a far more suitable form for comedy than the classic metre, — that is to say, for comedy in a light vein. However, Molière demonstrated a true poetic insight by writing *The Hypocrite* and *The Misanthrope* in Alexandrines. In such stately comedies *vers libres* would have been out of harmony.

Amphitryon was first played at the Palais Royal on January thirteenth, 1668, and Roederer[1] sees in Jupiter's replacement of Amphitryon as Alcmène's husband a travesty upon Monsieur de Montespan, who at the time was indulging in outbursts of jealous rage against his monarch for estranging his wife's affections. It is difficult to believe, however, that Molière was authorised by Louis to speak *ex cathedra* upon so delicate a matter, the more so, because, according to M. Mesnard, the details of the Montespan affair were then only whispered at court.

When Molière next wrote, he wisely forsook verse and Olympian characters for prose and the every-day people

[1] *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la société polie en France.*

he painted so inimitably. Never has he shown a more certain grasp of stage requirements than in *George Dandin; or, The Abashed Husband* (*George Dandin ou le Mari confondu*) — a comedy so swift in action, so clever in situation, and so terse in dialogue that it might justly serve as a model for all modern writers of stage humour. In its story of the successful efforts of an unfaithful wife to hoodwink her husband, vice rather than virtue is triumphant; yet it teaches a moral lesson nevertheless.

George Dandin, the duped husband, is a rich peasant proprietor, who has been inspired by a reverence for rank to marry Angélique, the daughter of an impecunious nobleman. His marital troubles are due to his wife's contempt for a husband beneath her in birth, — a contempt shared by her parents. Because a distasteful marriage with a man inferior to her in both birth and intellect has so dulled her moral nature that she can see no possible deliverance from her hateful thrall save in transgression, Angélique gives her heart to a man of her own caste and tricks her dull helpmate without compunction.

Vice is made to triumph in the person of this wife, in order that Molière may point the moral that a man who marries above his station is a fool worthy only of contempt, — a truth thus made apparent by poor George Dandin himself in the opening speech of the play:

A wife who is born a lady is a strange creature! and what a speaking lesson my marriage is to every peasant who tries to better his place in the world by tying himself, like me, to a nobleman's family. Nobility is well enough, and certainly worth respecting, but the things that go with it are so bad that I wish I had never rubbed against it. To my cost, I 've grown wise on that score,

and now know the ways of the nobility when they wish to make us enter their families. We don't count in the bargain; it is what we have that they marry; and, rich as I am, I should have done far better to have married like a good honest peasant than to have taken a wife who holds herself better than I am, feels ashamed to bear my name, and thinks that, with all my money, I have n't paid dear enough for the honour of being her husband. George Dandin! George Dandin! you have done the most foolish thing in the world. . . .

In spite of his wealth, George Dandin is of the soil. When convinced of his wife's misconduct, he would have beaten her had she been a peasant; but, overawed by her superior birth, he contents himself with mildly denouncing her behaviour to her parents. "I tell you I am much dissatisfied with my marriage!" he exclaims. "What!" answers his nobly born mother-in-law, "can you speak thus of a marriage from which you have derived such great advantages?" "The bargain has not been a bad one for you," the peasant son-in-law retorts, "for my money has stopped pretty large gaps in the run-down state of your affairs; but what have I got by it, pray, except in making my name longer? Instead of being George Dandin, I have gained, through you, the title of Monsieur de la Dandinière."

The spirited plot of this play is too intricate to be recounted in full. Suffice it to say that George Dandin is continually baffled in his efforts to convince his wife's parents of their daughter's misconduct, until, overhearing a confession of love made by her to a young nobleman named Clitandre, he locks his door against her, only to be duped by a ruse of feigned suicide. When he comes forth in his night shirt with a lighted candle to search

for his wife's body, she slips past him in the dark, and, entering the house, bolts the door. Mistress now of the situation, Angélique denounces him to her parents as a drunken brute who has maltreated her; whereupon the poor man is forced by his father-in-law to kneel in his unclad state and beg forgiveness of a wife whom he knows by her own confession to be false, — a situation which brings the comedy to a close.

Written to grace a Versailles fête, *George Dandin* was first played at court in July, 1668, but in construction as well as in characterisation it is a histrionic masterpiece. Some of its situations occur in a story by Boccaccio, and were used by Molière in his one-act farce, *The Jealousy of Smutty Face;* yet the author's masterly portraiture acquits him of the charge of plagiarism. George Dandin is so true to life that he must have been a patron of Maître Gély's barber shop at Pézenas, while the originals of the Baron and Baroness de Sotenville, his parents-in-law, were doubtless decayed gentlefolks of the Prince de Conti's court.

The tricks Angélique plays upon her husband are farcical, yet this story of a parvenu's marriage with a woman of rank is so thoroughly human that this play, although absurd in plot, is nevertheless a comedy of manners of our own as well as of Molière's day. If an impecunious nobleman marries his daughter to a peasant proprietor, or his son to an American heiress, the moral result is the same; for, whatever temporary pranks love may play with social conditions, marriage will not level all ranks, nor can it be made an object of barter without courting consequences such as befell poor George Dandin in his marriage of convenience.

Avarice, "the good old-gentlemanly vice," as Byron

calls it, is the text of Molière's next dramatic homily; and in the almost tragic fervour of his words this same preacher skirts the sublime heights he attained in his sermons against hypocrisy and worldliness; for *The Miser* (*L'Avare*), a prose comedy in five acts with cupidity as its theme, ranks next in point of earnestness to *The Misanthrope* and *The Hypocrite*. Being serious in theme, and from a comedy point of view pure in treatment, it takes perforce a high place among its author's plays.

The plot is borrowed mainly from the *Aulularia* of Plautus; while, for the various incidents, so many sources have been drawn upon that, according to Riccoboni, *The Miser* does not contain four original scenes;[1] yet it is idle to ask who has depicted these before. The same models have been used, but the same picture has never been painted; for although the details are borrowed, in the *ensemble* Molière's sure touch is ever apparent. Indeed, the name Harpagon has become a household word. Molière's miser is a man whose avarice "sticks deeper, grows with more pernicious root, than summer-seeming lust," — in short, a lickpenny, who, in the words of his son's valet, is "of all mortals the hardest and most close-fisted"; a man willing to bestow "praise, esteem, kind words, and friendship, but never money."

He belongs to the bourgeoisie, — a class whose thrift when carried to excess becomes the vice of avarice. He has a daughter, Élise by name, and a son who borrows money at usurious rates from Jewish money-lenders. Valère, a young man who has introduced himself into the household in the capacity of steward, is in love with Élise; while Cléante, the prodigal son, has fallen a victim to the charms of Mariane, a penniless young

[1] *Observations sur la comédie et sur le génie de Molière*, 1736.

lady of the neighbourhood. Harpagon, however, upsets the plans of these lovers by promising Élise's hand to a rich man named Anselme and by avowing his intention to marry Mariane himself. Few stronger themes for a dramatic story exist than the rivalry of a father and son, — a theme developed so seriously by Molière in *The Miser* that the play at moments, ceasing to be a comedy, becomes a drama; as, for instance, when Cléante, learning that, besides being a rival, his father is the usurer who is lending him money through a Jew at exorbitant interest rates, thus tears the fifth commandment in shreds:

Do you not blush to dishonour your station by the trade you are engaged in; to sacrifice glory and reputation to the insatiable desire of piling crown upon crown, and to surpass, in matters of interest, the most infamous tricks that ever were invented by the most notorious usurers? . . . Which, think you, is the more criminal, — he who buys money of which he is in need, or he who steals money for which he has no use?

Undismayed by this arraignment and regardless of his son's passion, Harpagon, aided by a *femme d'intrigue* named Frosine, prepares to wed Mariane himself. The scene wherein the miser instructs his household regarding their duties at the betrothal supper is by far the most humorous in the play:

Come here, all of you, and let me give you your orders for this evening and assign to each his task! Approach, Dame Claude; I 'll begin with you. Good! I see you bear your arms [her broom] in hand. Your duty will be to make everything clean and tidy, but take especial care not to rub the furniture too hard for fear of wearing it out. Moreover, I appoint you during the

supper to the management of the bottles, and if one is lost or anything broken, I shall look to you for it, and shall take it out of your wages. . . . You, Brindavoine, and you, La Merluche, are to rinse the glasses and serve out the wine, but only when any of the company are thirsty, and not like those rascally lackeys who go and press people and put it into their heads to drink when they don't wish to. Wait till you have been asked more than once, — and always remember to serve plenty of water.

The most comical character in the play is Maître Jacques, a factotum playing the dual rôle of cook and coachman in Harpagon's niggardly household. Whenever he is addressed in a capacity opposed to the costume he is wearing, he solemnly changes his coachman's livery for a cook's smock, or vice versa, — a bit of by-play which invariably keeps an audience in roars of laughter. When asked by his master for the world's opinion of him, Maître Jacques truthfully paints Harpagon's character, even though his candour costs him a thrashing:

Sir, since you will have it, I tell you frankly that you are laughed at everywhere; that you are the object of hundreds of gibes; for people are never so happy as when putting you on the rack and telling tales of your stinginess. One neighbour says you have private almanacs printed, in which you double the ember-days and vigils in order to profit by the extra fasts your household must observe; another, that you have a quarrel always ready to pick with your servants at "boxing" time, or when they are leaving, so that you may have a pretext for giving them nothing. One man says that you once swore out a warrant against a neighbour's cat for having eaten the scraps of a leg of mutton; and still another that you were caught one night stealing your

own horses' oats, and that your coachman — my predecessor — gave you I don't know how many blows, in the dark, with a bludgeon, about which you never ventured to say anything. In short, — shall I tell you? — I can go nowhere without hearing you hauled over the coals. You are the laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood, and you are never spoken of except as a miser, an extortioner, and a niggardly skinflint.

Fearful that robbers may enter his house, Harpagon buries in his garden a casket containing ten thousand livres, and when his son's valet discovers its hiding-place, the prodigal purloins this treasure as a means for bringing his father to terms. But the charm of this play does not lie in its somewhat stilted plot. Harpagon is the personification of greed, painted by a master hand. Take, for instance, these lines spoken when he discovers the loss of his buried treasure, — a speech fairly Balzacian in its sordid frenzy:

Stop thief! stop thief! Hold the assassin! stop the murderer! Justice, great Heaven! I am undone, assassinated! They have cut my throat! They've stolen my money! Who can have done it? What has become of him? Where is he? — where is he hiding? What can I do to find him? Where shall I run? where shall I not run? Is he here? Is he there? Who 's that? Stop! [He clutches himself by the arm.] Give back my money, you scoundrel! — It is myself! my mind 's distraught — I know not where I am, nor what I do. Alas! my poor money! my poor money! my dear friend! thou hast been taken from me; and since thou art gone, I have lost my sole support, my consolation, my joy; all is ended, I have nothing left to keep me in this world. Without thee, it is impossible to live. All is over; I have no more strength; I am dying; I am dead; I am buried. Will no one raise me from the dead

by giving me back my beloved money, or by telling me who has taken it? Eh! what's that you say? Nobody spoke. There 's no one here! The one who robbed me must have carefully spied out the hour, and chosen the very time when I was talking to my rascally son. Come — I will seek justice. I 'll have my whole house put upon the rack — maids, valets, son, daughter — and myself. I see them all assembled there! I suspect them all; each looks to me like a thief. What are they talking about down there? About the thief who robbed me? What noise is that up there? Is it my thief? For Heaven's sake, if you have any news of him, tell me, I pray you! Is he hidden there amongst you? They all stare at me and laugh. You will see that they had a share in the theft. Quick, policemen, archers, provosts, judges! racks, gallows, and hangmen! I 'll hang the whole lot of them, and if I don't recover my money, I 'll then hang myself.

Because of its disregard of the dramatic canon that a play in five acts must be written in verse — a contempt for the rules Molière had already evinced in *Don Juan* — *The Miser*, when first presented on the stage of the Palais Royal, September ninth, 1668,[1] called forth considerable protest from contemporary critics. A modern censor will feel more inclined, however, to take exception to the baseness of its picture of a man's degraded love of wealth and a son's undutifulness than to quibble over Aristotelian principles; for commanding as is the realistic strength of this play, one turns with a certain sense of relief from Harpagon the miser to Monsieur Jourdain the socially ambitious tradesman, whose desire to pass

[1] Grimarest places the first production in January, 1668, while Voltaire arbitrarily selects the year 1667; but La Grange makes no mention of *The Miser* until Sunday, September ninth, 1668, when he announces its first production as a new piece (*pièce nouvelle de M. de Molière*).

the portals of society inspires the title of *The Burgher, a Gentleman* (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*). Here, at least, is a character meriting one's sympathy, — a character truer, too, than its predecessor to the life of our day, for the miser of Molière's time has become a Wall-Street magnate, whereas the social climber is found wherever organised society exists.

A retired shopkeeper, ignorant of the ways of the world, Monsieur Jourdain resolves to bridge the gulf separating him from the nobly born. His desire to receive social recognition is an obsession, yet his endeavours to acquire fine clothes and manners are so complacent and sincere that, laughable though he be, he is, nevertheless, a genuine human being, made lovable by his beaming simplicity.

Finding low born manners a bar to the fulfilment of his ambition, Monsieur Jourdain, much to the disgust of his worthy wife and outspoken maid-of-all-work, resolves to educate himself. The first two acts are devoted to his efforts in this direction as well as to the quarrels of his various professors of music, dancing, fencing, and philosophy for ascendency over their "milch cow," as Madame Jourdain calls her lord; yet the only tangible progress Monsieur Jourdain makes in the acquirement of knowledge is to learn that all which is not verse is prose. Discovering to his great delight that when he asks for his slippers he is speaking prose, he thus communicates this knowledge to his wife:

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN

Do you know what you are talking at this moment?

MADAME JOURDAIN

I know I am talking good sense, and that you ought to change your manner of living.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN

I don't mean that. I mean, do you know what the words are that you are saying?

MADAME JOURDAIN

They are sensible words, and that's more than I can say of your conduct.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN

I don't mean that. I ask you, what I am now saying to you at the present moment, what is it?

MADAME JOURDAIN

Stuff and nonsense.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN

It's *prose*, you ignorant woman!

MADAME JOURDAIN

Prose?

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN

Yes, *prose*. All that is prose is not verse, and all that is not verse is prose. There! That's what one learns by study.

To further his passion for entering society, Monsieur Jourdain allows himself to become the dupe of Dorante, an unscrupulous nobleman whom he lends vast sums of money, even permitting him the use of his house for the purpose of carrying on an intrigue with a marchioness named Dorimène. Assured by this *chevalier d'industrie* that Dorimène views his own attentions with no unfavourable eye, Monsieur Jourdain lavishes presents upon her, for which Dorante, of course, takes the credit; and, having induced his better half to spend an evening out, the deluded man regales the noble marchioness with a sumptuous banquet, brought to an untimely end by the

appearance of Madame Jourdain in the rôle of outraged wife.

The love plot is merely accessary to Monsieur Jourdain's ambitions, but it serves to inspire an incident whereby that worthy bourgeois's obsession is made the excuse for the ballet which concludes the play. Cléonte, an estimable young man, is in love with Monsieur Jourdain's daughter Lucile,[1] and when he demands her hand, her father asks him if he is a gentleman. He replies thus:

Sir, in answering that question most people show slight hesitation; the word is easily spoken. Little scruple is shown in the assumption of that name, and present custom seems to authorise the theft; yet, for my part, I confess my feelings on this point are a little more delicate. I maintain that all imposture is unworthy of an honest man, and that it is cowardice to disguise what Heaven has made, and deck ourselves for the eyes of the world with a stolen title, or to wish to pass for what one is not. I am born of parents who doubtless have filled honourable posts. I have acquitted myself creditably as a soldier by six years of service, and I am sufficiently well-to-do to maintain a middling rank in society; yet notwithstanding all this, I shall not assume a name which others in my place might think they had a right to bear; therefore I shall tell you frankly that I am not a gentleman.

Many a modern young man might emulate this modesty with credit to himself; many a designing mother, too, might well study the homely philosophy which Madame Jourdain propounds in support of Cléonte's suit:

[1] The reader will recall the scene between Cléonte and his valet Covielle, quoted on page 151, in which Cléonte, picturing the charms of his lady-love, in reality draws a portrait of Armande Béjart, who played the rôle of Lucile.

Alliances with people above one's station are subject to grievous drawbacks. I wish no son-in-law of mine to be able to reproach my daughter with her parents, or to have children ashamed to call me grandmother.

Deaf, however, to this sound reasoning, Monsieur Jourdain refuses Cléonte on the ground that he is not a gentleman, whereupon Covielle, the discarded lover's valet, concocts a scheme to further his master's cause. Disguised as an emissary of the son of the Grand Turk, as the Sultan was then called, Covielle tells Monsieur Jourdain that his imperial highness has conceived an attachment for his daughter, Lucile, and that in order to raise him to a rank befitting such an alliance, he has resolved upon making him a Mamamouchi. Cléonte appearing disguised as a Turk and accompanied by a band of mummers, Monsieur Jourdain is duly invested with the imaginary dignity of Mamamouchi and a costume befitting his rank. When let into the secret of her husband's crowning folly, Madame Jourdain consents to the union of her daughter with the Sultan's fictitious heir, while Dorante, who has used his middle class dupe for the purpose of winning Dorimène, is rewarded by that lady's hand.

The first three acts of this delightful play are in the spirit of pure comedy, but the other two fall to the level of farce, — a descent, however, for which Molière is blameless. The advent in Paris of a Turkish ambassador had created such a sensation at court that upon his departure the King commanded Molière to write a comedy[1] introducing a Turkish ballet, for which Lully was

[1] According to Bruzen de la Martinière, Colbert suggested to the King the subject of a Turkish farce for the purpose of ridiculing the disdainful Turkish envoy.

ordered to compose the music, and a certain Chevalier d'Arvieux, who had spent some time in the Orient, to provide local colour.

When played before Louis at Chambord in October, 1670, *The Burgher, a Gentleman* was, according to Grimarest, "a failure"; for "the King said nothing about it at supper, and the courtiers tore it to pieces," with the result that "the mortified author took to his room for a period of five days." When the play was regiven, the King broke his discouraging silence by telling Molière that "he had never written a more amusing play," yet, as the comedy was repeated at court within two, instead of five, days after its first representation, Grimarest's anecdote must be accepted with considerable caution, the more so because, according to the official gazette, the new piece was played four times within eight days.

There are reasons, however, for crediting the displeasure of the courtiers. Molière's villain, Dorante, a well-born sharper, who uses his social position as a means for relieving a shopkeeping lover of station of his money, is of their caste, while the pretensions of people of quality are made the object of an irony so delicious that *The Burgher, a Gentleman* stands pre-eminent among Molière's satirical plays. Indeed, despite its farcical dénouement, it is a comedy of manners so true to humanity that Monsieur Jourdain has become the universally accepted portrait of the parvenu.

Social ambition being a folly, not a vice, this simple shopkeeper, befuddled with love for rank, whose inborn impulse it is to rub his hands obsequiously and scrape to persons of quality, represents a type quite different from George Dandin, the slowly thinking peasant. "Is not this bourgeois infatuated with nobility the most arrant

fool, the most perfect booby we know?" asks M. Paul Mesnard; yet Monsieur Jourdain's infatuation is, after all, a weakness most of us have experienced to a more or less degree, — the very weakness, indeed, upon which all aristocracies are based.

In spite of the fact that certain scenes have been traced to Aristophanes, Cervantes, Rotrou, and others, *The Burgher, a Gentleman* remains one of Molière's truest and most original creations.

A one-act corollary of this play is *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*. Here the social climber appears as a foolish provincial lady, who, after two months spent in Paris, apes the manners of the court and the intellectual languishments of the *précieuses*. In love with a viscount, who, like Dorante, makes use of her credulity to further his suit for another's hand, the countess flirts meantime with a provincial counsellor and a tax-gatherer, because, as she wisely says, "it is unwise to leave one lover master of the field, lest his love go to sleep through too much confidence and the lack of rivalry." Her provincial admirers are "humoured, in case she might wish to make use of them," — a wise proceeding, since, losing the tax-gatherer through her absurd pretensions, the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas takes the advice of the viscount whose tool she has been, and marries the counsellor, "to spite the whole world." This little comedy, so slight in construction, was intended merely to serve as an introduction for a court ballet given at St. Germain on December second, 1671, yet it is a charming conceit, — a sheet from Molière's note-book of country manners made when he sojourned at the Prince de Conti's court; a simple pencil sketch, as it were, of provincial follies drawn so deftly that, though farcical in form and slender

in outline, it is a picture of actual life, and therefore comedy.

Being the manager of a popular theatre, Molière was tempted during the later years of his life to dress old scenes and characters in new clothes. Forced to fill his theatre, like Shakespeare, he studied the necessities of the stage, — an exigency which makes *The Rascalities of Scapin* (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*), his next piece, thoroughly praiseworthy from a stage point of view; yet in reverting to Italian imbroglio, the false art of his youth, Molière here sacrificed upon the altar of his public both characterisation and atmosphere, the very elements which make his plays so peerless.

In Scapin, the character whose knavery gives this farce its title, we have the rogue of Italian mummery, proud of his lies and trickery, — in short, the Mascarille of Molière's youth. Indeed, the rascalities Scapin employs on behalf of two young Neapolitan gentlemen are strongly reminiscent of those invented by the valet of Lélie the blunderer to aid his master. In this instance there are two young men, each opposed by an irate father in his endeavours to wed a young woman who, unknown to either, happens to be the very person most expedient for him to marry. One of these, Octave by name, having wedded his inamorata during his father's absence, becomes so terrified at the prospect of parental ire that he has recourse to Scapin, the valet of his friend Léandre, a resourceful rascal "endowed by Heaven with a fine genius for all those happy expedients of wit, those gallantries to which the vulgar give the name of knavery."

"I may say without vanity," declares this new Mascarille, "that no man has ever been more clever than I in managing all the springs of intrigue." Needing money to

compass his knavery, this rascal resolves to filch from the parents of his young employers. Accordingly, he tells Géronte, father of Léandre, that his son, enticed aboard the galley of a young Turk to dine and wine, has been carried out to sea and held for a ransom, which he, Scapin, has been charged to collect. Astonished by this preposterous demand, Géronte repeats, at intervals, during Scapin's recital of his son's predicament, the words, "What the devil did he intend to do in that galley?" (*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*) — a phrase in whole or in part more widely quoted, perhaps, than any in the French language. Indeed, Géronte's bewilderment is so intense that throughout Scapin's arguments he constantly reiterates this question, until the rogue has obtained the needed money.

This famous scene occurs almost in its entirety in *The Tricked Pedant* (*Le Pédant joué*) of Cyrano de Bergerac, and although M. Louis Moland[1] cites an Italian *scenario* which may have inspired both playwriters, the phrase *qu'allait-il faire dans cette galère*, occurring in the earlier play, is circumstantial evidence, at least, that Molière helped himself to Cyrano's product, — an act he justifies by the assertion of his right "to take possession of his property wherever found."[2]

In this instance he possesses himself of the "property" of Terence as well as that of Cyrano de Bergerac; while in placing a character in a gunny sack to be beaten

[1] *Molière et la comédie italienne*, 1867.

[2] *Il m'est permis de reprendre mon bien où je le trouve*, are words ascribed to Molière by Grimarest; and this phraseology has led certain commentators to suggest the possibility of a youthful collaboration which inspired Molière to refurbish a scene he had once contributed to Cyrano's play.

soundly by Scapin under the pretence of defending him from a horde of imaginary bravos, he cements, as Boileau has suggested, an unholy alliance between Tabarin[1] and the classic drama.

Although *The Rascalities of Scapin* is distinctly a play of action, it is, despite deft touches from Molière's brush, little more than an Italian imbroglio, — in other words, a farce of "three or four surprises, two or three disguises, combats and tumults."

First presented on the stage of the Palais Royal, May twenty-fourth, 1671, it still holds a place in the repertory of the Comédie Française, — an honour due to histrionic rather than literary value; for in spite of its "side-splitting" qualities one is tempted to agree with Boileau and pronounce it unworthy of the great creator of character comedy.

Indeed, as if aware that Scapin's rascalities were unbecoming his genius, Molière returned to his own in *The Learned Women* (*Les Femmes savantes*), a five-act comedy in verse, produced at the Palais Royal, March eleventh, 1672. In this, the last of his plays save *The Imaginary Invalid*, Molière almost reaches his highest level; for only in its lack of a commanding character, such as Alceste or Tartuffe, and in a corresponding intensity of purpose, is this play inferior to his two great masterpieces. Its verse is more polished, its comedy purer, perhaps, than any he ever wrote. Only in vigour does it fail to rival his greatest work; for as a satire upon

[1] Tabarin was a famous mountebank of the Pont Neuf, and is supposed to have originated this scene. It was a more or less common farce situation, however, in Molière's day, and probably formed the subject of a *canevas* entitled *Gorgibus dans le sac* played by Molière's strolling company and presumably composed by its manager.

society from the pen of a moralist who felt "he could do nothing better than attack the follies of his time with ridiculous likenesses," *The Learned Women* stands but a step below the *The Misanthrope* and *The Hypocrite*.

In writing this comedy Molière once more employed material he had used in former plays; for his blue stockings — so ridiculous in their craving for knowledge — suggest Cathos and Magdelon, the *précieuses* of his first great comedy; while Trissotin, a literary Pecksniff, and Vadius, his pedantic friend, are reminiscent of the poets Lysidas and Du Croisy of *The Criticism of The School for Wives* and of *The Versailles Impromptu*, respectively.

The Learned Women, however, is written in a key so different that it cannot be called a replica. It satirises the assumptions of fashionable wits and the mawkish sentimentality of culture seeking women; yet there is no vivacious Mascarille to deck himself in borrowed plumage, no purely farcical situation. Indeed, Molière's desire is manifestly to preach a sermon upon the text that woman was created to play a domestic rôle in life. His play is written with such fidelity to nature that, shorn of their seventeenth century garments, his strong minded blue stockings might readily pass for "new women"; yet in outlining their characters he has followed the changing fashions of his own time. The *précieuse* was rapidly becoming an *encyclopédiste*, the cult of verbiage giving place to a boudoir sciolism, — a betterment, perhaps, in intention; yet in this feminine pursuit of knowledge the domestic virtues were stifling. Against this dangerous tendency Molière preached his last sermon, choosing, to illustrate his text, an upper middle class family whose feminine members are beset with a craving for culture. Chrysale, a *bon bourgeois*, as Molière

calls him, is the henpecked husband of an imperious wife named Philaminte, the despotic ruler of a feminine realm whose lawgiver is Vaugelas the grammarian. Queen Philaminte's subjects are Armande, her feline daughter, and her sister-in-law, an absurd spinster named Bélise, who imagines herself beloved of all men. Trissotin, a fashionable poet, is prime minister of this domain of culture. Its peace is marred, however, by sensible Henriette, the youngest daughter of Philaminte. This worthy representative of true womanhood is loved by Clitandre, a commendable young man of fashion, whose affections are claimed by Armande as well as by her spinster aunt Bélise. This much loved hero is supported in his suit for Henriette's hand by her father, until that gentleman has the temerity to broach the matter to his wife.

Bent upon marrying Henriette to Trissotin the poet, Philaminte routs her husband so completely that he capitulates unconditionally; yet, fortunately for the course of true love, this browbeaten paterfamilias has a brother named Ariste, a counterpart of his sensible namesake in *The School for Husbands*, of Cléante in *The Hypocrite*, and of Philinte in *The Misanthrope*. Knowing that Trissotin's sole desire is to wed his niece's fortune, Ariste plays him a pious trick. The rhymester is told that Chrysale has been ruined financially and his daughter consequently made penniless, whereupon he withdraws his suit and hastily takes to flight, leaving the field to Clitandre.

The real charm of this play, however, lies in its masterful characterisation, since the plot is merely a frame for a faithfully outlined sketch of seventeenth century manners. Indeed, Molière pursues the follies of strong

mindedness through scene after scene with an irony so ruthless that it is difficult to believe that domineering Philaminte, cat-like Armande, and fatuous Bélise, each so obsessed with a mania for culture, are not apostles of Browning, Ibsen, or Maeterlinck. Chrysale, too, the meek, long-suffering husband, is a perennial type, and Martine, the maid-of-all-work, discharged by Philaminte because she murders the language of Vaugelas, has many a modern Irish counterpart, ready to take corresponding liberties with the King's English.

The most caustic satire of this play is found in the scene where Trissotin, the fortune-hunting poet, declaims a precious sonnet of his own to the three learned women. Called Tricotin in the original draft of the play, this Trissotin, whose name has been interpreted as the equivalent of *trois fois sot* (three times stupid), is an unmistakable portrait to the life of the Abbé Cotin, an Academician of the day, whose success with rondeaux, madrigals, and enigmas had led him to arrogate unto himself the title of "Father of French epigram." In order that his shaft might not be aimed amiss, Molière inserted some of Cotin's own verses in this scene, — a piece of malice difficult to countenance. Moreover, Trissotin's pedantic friend Vadius is presumably a portrait of Ménage, a famous pedant of the ruelles.

For a time this *bel esprit* and *savant* extol each other's productions to the rapturous sighs of their dupes and the manifest disgust of rational Henriette; then Vadius, unaware that the poem Trissotin vaunts is composed by him, attacks it unmercifully, meantime demanding attention for a ballad of his own. This is Trissotin's cue to abuse balladry, whereupon the two sciolists exhaust their respective vocabularies in violent recrimination,

until Vadius leaves angrily, with the avowed threat of annihilating Trissotin with his pen.

This scene gave preciosity its *coup de grâce.* The Trissotins have long been dead and buried. Molière, however, lives, a worthy champion of simplicity and truth. Each of his characters depicts some fundamental human quality; each is a perennial type. In giving the scenes he borrowed a clearer atmosphere and by painting the characters he copied from others with simple yet forcible colours, he rose invariably superior to his models. Plautus and Terence imitated the Greeks; but these Latin poets depicted only a part of the manners of Rome. Molière painted not only the vices and follies common to all ages and all countries, but the characteristics of his own people so truthfully that his comedies are a history of the manners, fashions, and tastes of his century.

Many attempts have been made to liken him to Shakespeare; yet such comparisons, if not odious, are at best idle. Shakespeare wrote tragedy and romantic comedy; Molière, naturalistic comedy and farce. Living in an age when his countrymen sought adventures on many seas and brought to the shores of their native isle tales of wild exploits, Shakespeare found his subjects in the heroic history of England and Rome, in a fanciful Italy, or an imaginary Greece and Bohemia; whereas Molière, living in a polished and prescribed age occupied with its own achievements, painted the people of that age, not merely as a dramatic artist engaged in providing the stage with marketable plays, but as a highly minded philosopher who felt it his duty to expose the vices of society. The one was an idealist, writing, unhampered, in an age of adventure; the other, a realist fettered by three dramatic unities. "Molière was a caged eagle,"

M. Henri Mérou of the French consular service once said to the present writer; "had he been free, there are no heights to which his genius might not have flown." Instead of soaring as his fancy willed, the great Frenchman was condemned to beat his wings against his Aristotelian bars. Two men so diametrically different in temperament and opportunity as Shakespeare and Molière are not to be compared or classed as rivals. Each reflects the spirit of an age and the traditions of a race; each, in his way, is an incomparable genius, to whom all the subsequent dramatists of the world have been indebted for inspiration and light.

XVIII

DEATH

That propensity toward affection with which the author of *The Famous Comédienne* says Molière was born, is made so apparent in his writings that it is idle to believe the years he spent in retirement at Auteuil were other than years of anguish. According to his wife's libeller, he enjoyed his greatest pleasure at his country house, "where he had placed his daughter"; and there he doubtless amused himself in educating the child as he had the mother, though profiting, let it be hoped, by experience.

Madeleine-Esprit was a child of two at the time Molière sought asylum in the suburbs, and surely the rôle of Louison in *The Imaginary Invalid* was inspired by her; for this child's part is written with a tenderness and fidelity inconceivable had not children plucked the poet's gown "to share the good man's smile." Moreover his sonnet to La Mothe le Vayer betrays a knowledge of paternal love too profound to have been imagined. Finally, in the verses of *Psyche* written by Molière, he exclaims that the harsh fatalities which remove for ever persons dear to us bear "cruelties to crush out hearts," beside which "envy's poison and the shafts of hatred" are minor trials to one "whose sovereign is reason."

At the time these last lines were penned Molière had lived apart from Armande Béjart about four years, and if reason was his sovereign he proved a most unheedful subject; for while he was thus proclaiming her sovereignty he was apparently seeking a reconciliation with his capricious wife. *Psyche* was played during the carnival of 1671, and Armande Béjart fell ill at this time, — a circumstance which may have inspired a spirit of forgiveness in her husband's heart.

As their third child[1] was born in September of the following year, Molière's reunion with his wife surely occurred no later than the end of 1671. Grimarest, however, places this event ten months before the first production of *The Imaginary Invalid*, — an assertion which would make the time of its occurrence some time in April, 1672. He is manifestly in error, for in addition to the tangible proof presented by the birth of Molière's last child, the circumstantial evidence may be cited of Boileau's assertion that the poet left him to correct alone some verses in the first act of *The Learned Women* while he (Molière) "went out a moment with his wife."[2] As this play was produced in March, 1672, there was apparently little need at that time for the intervention of those friends who, according to Grimarest, endeavoured to adjust the relations of this ill assorted couple, or rather "to make them live together more agreeably." Since Boileau and Mignard's little daughter stood sponsors for the child born after the reunion, the critic and the painter were apparently those most instrumental in bringing that desirable event to pass. One account, however,

[1] Pierre-Jean-Baptiste-Armand, who survived his birth but a few weeks.

[2] *MSS. de Brossette.*

makes the Marquis de Jonsac the peacemaker, and the reconciliation a matter of theatrical policy purely, since it appears that —

Molière, with the intention of offering his wife the rôle of Angélique in *The Imaginary Invalid*, and knowing how much the sweetness of her voice would add to the expression of its natural sentiments, had conceived this part in a way sufficiently pleasing to make the actress to whom it was given applauded from beginning to end. Jonsac made Mme. Molière appreciate the value of such consideration on the part of an ill treated husband. Possibly this motive touched her slightly, but the hope of pleasing the public in a part written for her made her decide. The reconciliation took place the same evening.[1]

This story makes the restoration of domestic harmony occur upon the completion of *The Imaginary Invalid*, — a case impossible unless there had been another rupture after the birth of the last Molière child. The only indication that such a breach took place is to be found in the story told by the author of *The Famous Comédienne* regarding a love affair between Armande Béjart and Baron, the young actor who left Molière's company in 1666 because that very lady boxed his ears.

Baron had been touring the provinces with a travelling company, but shortly after the Easter closing of the Palais Royal in 1670, having been urged by Molière

[1] *Extrait des Mémoires de Mme. Guérin veuve de Molière*, published by the Abbé d'Allainval in 1822 (*Collection des mémoires dramatiques*). These memoirs are, in the main, a compilation from *The Famous Comédienne*, and this anecdote is avowedly taken from that work; but according to M. Paul Mesnard there is no edition of *The Famous Comédienne* in which it occurs.

to rejoin his forces, he became a member of the "King's Troupe, entitled to a full share of the receipts,"[1] while Mlle. Beauval of the provincial organisation with which this young actor had travelled, and, according to Robinet, "an actress of royal discrimination," was received in the company, together with her husband.

The interesting feature of the second advent of Molière's protégé as a member of the Palais Royal forces lies, however, in his friendship with the poet. The following account by Grimarest of their relations may be taken as coming from the young comedian's own lips:

The absence of Baron had caused Molière much suffering; for the education of this young man amused him in his moments of leisure. His family trials increased daily; he could not always work or seek distraction among his friends; moreover, he disliked numbers and constraint, and had nothing to amuse him or deaden his suffering. Having succeeded in acquiring a reputation as a man of good intellect, his saddest thought was that he was so open to reproach because his household was not more peaceful and better conducted; therefore he viewed Baron's return in the light of a domestic diversion which made it possible for him to lead more satisfactorily a tranquil life in conformity with his health and principles, and free from extraneous family pomp or even from those friends whose inopportune presence so often robs life of its most agreeable moments.

Baron, apparently no less desirous than Molière of renewing their former relations, returned to Paris immediately upon the receipt of his benefactor's invitation, and on the day of his arrival the poet went to the Porte St. Victor to meet him; but "country air and travelling had

[1] *Registre de la Grange.*

so jaded and disfigured" the young actor that Molière let him pass in the throng without recognition, though upon returning home, much disappointed, was rejoiced to find him already there. After recounting how Baron, having left his purse "at the last inn at which he slept," was too anxious to see Molière to return in quest of it, and how delighted the poet was to find his protégé so "grateful and so touched," Grimarest goes on to say that "Molière resumed the same care he had taken of him from the beginning, and one can imagine with what solicitude he set to work to train him in manners as well as in his profession."

Baron lived with Molière at Auteuil, retaining his benefactor's friendship until the latter's death. The story the author of *The Famous Comédienne* tells of the young actor's intrigue with Molière's wife places him in a light almost too ignoble; for, as M. Mesnard exclaims, "on the word of a cowardly pamphleteer, shall he be considered capable of such abominable ingratitude?"[1]

The base conduct imputed to Baron was supposedly brought about by his appearance with Armande Béjart in *Pysche* during the carnival of 1671, when she played the title rôle and he Cupid. According to the oft quoted scandal monger:

The joint praises they received forced them to examine each other with more attention and even with some degree of pleasure. He was the first to break the silence by paying her a compliment regarding the good fortune that had befallen him in being chosen to represent her lover, observing meantime that he owed the approval of the public to this lucky chance, and that it was not difficult to play the part of a person whose feelings one could so well understand. La Molière replied that the

[1] *Notice biographique sur Molière.*

praises bestowed on a man like himself were the reward of merit, and that she had no share in them; but that gallantry on the part of one who was reputed to have had so many successes in love did not surprise her, for he must be as accomplished an actor outside the theatre as upon the stage. Baron, to whom such reproaches were not displeasing, told her that he had indeed some acquaintances that one might call *bonnes fortunes*, but that he was prepared to sacrifice all for her, since he would set more value on the smallest of her favours than on any which the ladies who had smiled upon him were able to bestow; whereupon he mentioned their names, with a discretion which was natural to him.

To abbreviate an unpleasant story, Armande was so pleased with this debonair love-making that she consented to a continuation of their respective rôles off the stage, but Baron proved so faithless an admirer that the intrigue was of short duration. Since the hero of this unsavoury romance is reputed to have pictured himself in the title rôle of his comedy, *L'Homme à bonnes fortunes*, the name of which is untranslatable, unless it be called *The Lady Killer*, and as La Bruyère paints him under the name of Roscius as a conceited jackanapes, he was perhaps capable of this "abominable ingratitude" toward his benefactor; yet that such an amour could have been carried on under Molière's jealous eyes while Baron remained his friend is scarcely conceivable; hence the story of the intrigue, together with an even baser insinuation regarding the young man's relations with the poet, may be dismissed as the unproved slander of a coward.

Molière's questionable wife may be left for the moment to her capricious ways, while the centre of the family stage is taken by her more sympathetic sister

Madeleine. In *The Versailles Impromptu* the elder Béjart is clearly drawn by the poet himself. "You will represent," he tells her, "one of those women who, because they do not make love, believe that everything else is permitted them"; and throughout his skit Madeleine's positive and intelligent character is distinctly drawn. Rallying Molière with the frankness their long intimacy warrants, she advises him upon the construction of his play and encourages him boldly to meet the attacks of his enemies, filling, in short, the rôle she played throughout his life; for, to quote M. Gustave Larroumet, "Madeleine, entire, is in *The Versailles Impromptu*, — her frank way of speaking, the soundness of her practical mind, her bantering good humour, and the enlightened affection she bore Molière."[1]

Since the romantic storm of their early days an equable friendship had arisen between Madeleine and the poet, wherein she appears in the light of a protector, comrade, and adviser. Among the theatrical jealousies and bickerings of the thirty years of their intimacy, not a single discordant note in character is recorded, save her wise opposition to Molière's marriage. Originally the star of the organisation, she accepted principal rôles or minor parts with equanimity, now playing Dorine in *The Hypocrite*, now a gypsy or a jaded nymph, finally retiring without a protest or a murmur from the stage she had graced so long.

After the production of *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, in 1669, she played her accustomed parts no more; and in the January following she lost her aged mother, Marie Hervé, upon whose grave in the parish cemetery of St. Paul she erected a tomb "with the desire," as the epi-

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

taph stated, "of showing, even after death, a few marks of the gratitude she felt for her friendship and the care she had always taken of her." Upon the second anniversary of Marie Hervé's death Madeleine drew her will, calling to her bedside for the purpose her attorneys, who pronounced her "ill of body, but sound in mind, memory, and judgment." "Commending her soul to her Creator," she ordered that her body be interred in the church of St. Paul "in the place where her family had the right of burial." Founding in perpetuity for the repose of her soul two weekly requiem masses, she endowed five paupers, to be chosen by her sisters, each with a daily income of five sous in honour of the five wounds of our Saviour; then, bequeathing to her brother Louis and her two sisters, Geneviève and Armande, an income of four hundred livres each, she constituted the latter a residuary legatee in trust of the remainder of her estate for the benefit of Molière's daughter and his "children yet to be born." A month later (February fourteenth, 1672), she drew a codicil to this will for the purpose of giving Armande more freedom in the care of the residuary estate, and, still sound of mind, she ordered it read aloud; whereupon she dictated a few slight corrections, though at that time barely able to trace her signature, since "sight and strength had failed her."

Three days later the end came. Madeleine died with a fortitude so marked that Robinet in his rhymed gazette exclaimed that she "acted well the part each mortal plays before the Fates, being a good Christian as well as a good actress." Her death was tragic, too, for not a single member of her family graced her bedside, — through no fault of theirs, however, since the Palais Royal players

had been commanded to Versailles. Molière's name figures in the burial act; therefore he paid his last respects to the woman who might have made him an ideal helpmate had his eyes not been blinded by her wayward sister's charms.

During the long tramp from the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where the funeral service was held, to the cemetery of St. Paul, he had ample time to look backward through the years to the hours when he trudged behind an ox cart while the friend whose mortal part he followed lightened the journey with her hopeful smile. The victim of a fatal disease, he knew he must soon be borne to his own last resting-place. Domestic trials weighed heavily upon him, glowing youth no longer spurred him on to mount "ambition's ladder," the King's favour was waning; the Academy, too, had scorned him, for no actor who blackened his face daily, no impious author such as he, might sit among the Immortals.[1]

Beset by enemies, his health irrevocably lost, he awaited death with a heart overborne by grief. Of the rash company who had signed the contract of "The Illustrious Theatre" with him on June thirtieth, 1643, Madeleine was the last, save her sister Geneviève. Of the little band of strollers who had followed him through France, Joseph Béjart, Gros René, and the beautiful Du Parc were dead, while Louis Béjart had retired with a pension; so the De Bries and Geneviève Béjart alone remained members of his company. His parents were

[1] A hundred years after his death, his bust was placed in the room where the Academicians met, with an inscription reading: "Nothing was lacking in his glory, he was lacking in ours."

dead; his sister Marie-Madeleine and his brothers had played no real part in his life. Overcome by the cares of his triple profession, he made it "a point of honour not to give up," yet "the thirst of praise" was quenched, the fever of battle no longer burned in his veins. In the words of M. Larroumet, "He buried his youth and his happiness that day. Death had marked him for his own, and walked by his side. In a year to a day, his hour would come."[1]

The dead woman had discovered his genius. Her will proves the affection she bore him. The inventory of her effects shows her frugal character. She lived in a two-room apartment on the fourth floor of a house at the corner of the rue St. Thomas du Louvre and the rue St. Honoré, — "a family phalanstery," since her mother, her sisters, her brothers, and Molière himself dwelt there at various times. Her furniture was simple, her wardrobe contained only necessary wearing apparel; and although her estate was considerable, she left little plate and fewer jewels; only in her theatrical costuming is extravagance perceptible, for here the instincts of an artist appear. Moreover, she left no debts. She paid an early tribute to the frailty of her sex, but her life thereafter proves her to have been a woman of exceptional talent and merit. The wiles of a young sister beguiled away the man she served so faithfully, yet she alone inspired and developed his genius. She lived to see the reconciliation between Molière and his wife, — it is to be hoped she played a generous part in bringing it to pass.

Born just seven months after Madeleine Béjart's death, Molière's third child died within a few days; but in

[1] *La Comédie de Molière.*

Pierre-Jean-Baptiste-Armand, the name with which he was christened, there is evidence that during the last year of his life the poet dwelt in comparative amity with his wife. Grimarest tells us that to make "the union more perfect," Molière gave up the use of milk and returned to meat, — "a change in diet which redoubled his cough and the inflammation of his lungs"; certainly a striking evidence of his desire to make full amends for the bitterness of the past. Furthermore, he left his Auteuil retreat and went to live in the rue Richelieu, in a style to suit his wife's extravagant and worldly tastes.[1] There this ill mated couple dwelt in a sumptuous apartment of fourteen rooms adorned with rare tapestries and objects of art. The inventory of Molière's effects published by M. Eudore Soulié[2] shows the costly nature of the furnishings, — the paintings and Oriental rugs, the clocks made by Raillard and Gavelle, the plate and jewels; while a *batterie de cuisine*, complete in every detail, indicates that although the poet had been converted to the principles of Descartes, his tastes remained true to the epicureanism of his youth. Like most artists, he loved luxury, and as a collector of *objets de vertu*, betrayed the taste one would expect of a man whose friends were the great poets and painters of his day. To quote Grimarest once more, "in gratifying himself he spared no expense"; and although his income has been estimated at thirty thousand livres, the estate he left at his death barely exceeded one year's revenue, — a further proof that he should

[1] *La Maison mortuaire de Molière* by Auguste Vitu is a volume devoted entirely to the facts relating to the site of Molière's last residence and the details regarding it.

[2] *Recherches sur Molière.*

have married frugal Madeleine Béjart instead of her extravagant sister.[1]

In youth an epicurean, in maturity a stoic, Molière's philosophy was the result of experience. Having accepted readily the love, pleasure, and glory life had given, he made resignation a shelter for his cares, and in the companionship of men of kindred tastes sought a solace to mellow the bitterness of his heart. Chapelle, a scoffer, and La Mothe le Vayer, a sceptic, were among his friends; yet deep within him was a veneration for established institutions, a reverence for the church no philosophy could stifle. His reconciliation with his wife was a tribute to the conventions; middle class antecedents prevented him from ever becoming a true sceptic, for although his convictions were those of a man of the world living in an atmosphere of doubt, faith was inherent. Gentle to women and manly to men, he was a gentleman in the broad sense; for there is no evidence to indicate that he was either mean, a coward, or dishonest, and much to prove he was both affectionate and brave. As an epicurean he took what the Fates laid at his door until the offering was a cup of sorrow; as a stoic he drank the bitter draught; but in his last hour he vainly sought a priest,

[1] M. Eudore Soulié (*Recherches sur Molière*) makes the following calculation of Molière's estate from the inventory taken after the poet's death:

Personal effects, furniture, clothes, plate, etc. .	18,000	livres
Due to the succession, including the 10,000 livres reclaimed by the widow from the Poquelin estate	25,000	"
Total	43,000	"
Less debts amounting to about . . .	3,000	"
Net assets	40,000	"

dying, as he had lived, a Christian at heart, a martyr to intolerance.

The end came suddenly, yet nature had given ample warning. La Grange records that on account of Molière's health the theatre was closed from the ninth to the twelfth of August, 1672. His illness had become an atrophy, and his friends tried in vain to induce him to retire from the stage. "I make it a point of honour not to give up," he told Boileau a little before his death, and rather than listen to good counsel he hurled defiance at disease. His enemies had satirised him as a hypochondriac; so he, the victim of an incurable malady, placed upon his stage an imaginary invalid, — "burdensome to all around," — and with sardonic humour referred to that "impertinent fellow Molière" as a man who "will prove far wiser than your doctors, for he will never demand their help." "If I were a physician," says the hypochondriac of his play, "I would be revenged for Molière's impudence by letting him die without succour," — an eerie prophecy, since scarcely were these words uttered upon the stage than the doctors were avenged.

Barred from the St. Germain fêtes by the intrigues of Lully, *The Imaginary Invalid* was produced at the Palais Royal on the tenth of February, 1673, while the troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne was playing Racine's *Mithridates* before the ungrateful King. During the fourth performance of Molière's play (February seventeenth) its author was seized with a convulsion and died almost within the hour. The story of his tragic end has been told by Grimarest with a terseness and pathos hard to excel.[1]

[1] Baron, from whom this much challenged biographer learned his facts, was with Molière at the time of his death; therefore Grimarest's account of this event may be accepted with considerable reliance.

It appears that on the day he died[1] the inflammation in his lungs annoyed him more than usual; so, sending for his wife, he told her in Baron's presence: "So long as pain and pleasure have been equally present in my life, I had thought myself happy; but now," he protested, "I am overwhelmed with troubles and have not a moment either of enjoyment or rest. I see plainly that I must give up the struggle. I cannot hold out against the pains and worries which leave me without an instant's peace"; then, pondering a moment, he added, "How much a man suffers before he dies!"

His wife and Baron implored him with tears in their eyes not to act that day; but his point of honour proved unalterable. "What can I do?" he exclaimed. "There are fifty poor workpeople who live on their day's wage; what would they do if there were no performance?"

It would have been easy for a man of his means to indemnify these poor labourers for the loss of a day's pay, yet Molière's heart was apparently set upon dying in harness, since, unmindful of the protests of his wife and Baron, he sent for the actors of his company. Telling them that his health was worse that day, he warned them that he "would not play unless all was in readiness punctually at four o'clock."

At the hour set the candles were lighted and the curtain drawn; but Molière played his part with difficulty, half the audience perceiving that in pronouncing the word *juro*, in the mock ceremony which concludes the play, a convulsion had seized him. That fantastic ballet became indeed a dance of death; for while his sham

[1] Grimarest says "on the day of the third performance of *The Imaginary Invalid*," although Molière died on the day of the fourth performance, — an error probably due to Baron's defective memory.

physicians, apothecaries, and surgeons grimaced and pirouetted in mockery of those so powerless to arrest the ebbing of his life, Molière's last struggle began. It was a point of honour not to give up, so when he saw that the audience had noticed his agony, "he forced a smile and with a superhuman effort held life in his body until the curtain fell."

Tottering then to Baron's dressing-room, he asked characteristically what the public thought of the piece. His friend assured him that "his works were always immensely successful when known, and that the more they were played, the more they were liked"; then noticing Molière's appearance, he remarked that he seemed worse. "It is true," the poet answered, "I am dying of cold." Touching his hands, Baron found them frozen and warmed them in his muff,[1] while he sent for his friend's sedan. When the chair came, he accompanied him home, "fearful lest some mishap might befall him between the Palais Royal and the rue Richelieu."

Upon reaching his friend's apartment, Baron advised Molière to take some of the beef broth his wife kept ready for her own use, — "no one," as Grimarest says, "being more regardful of personal comfort than she." "My wife's soups are like brandy," the poet replied; "you know all the ingredients she puts in them." Asking for some Parmesan cheese which La Forest brought, he ate it and was assisted to his bed; then, sending to his wife for a pillow filled with a drug "she had promised would make him sleep," he remarked: "Anything which does not enter the body I take willingly, but the remedies which must be swallowed alarm me. I wish nothing to rob me of the little life I have left."

[1] An article at that time carried by men of fashion.

Seized a moment later with a fit of coughing, he asked for a light, and Baron, seeing he had a hæmorrhage, betrayed such alarm that Molière assured him he need have no fear, as "he had already seen far more. Still," the dying man added, "go call my wife."

Two nuns were with him at the time, "of the kind who were wont to come to Paris during Lent to ask for charity." He had given them a lodging in his house, and from them he received such "spiritual comfort as might have been expected from their charity,"[1] while, in the words of Grimarest, "all the sentiments of a good Christian were manifested to them, together with the resignation he owed to the will of God." Suffocated at last by the blood pouring from his mouth, he drew his final breath in the arms of those two good women. When his wife and Baron reached the room, he was dead.

The petition presented the archbishop of Paris by the poet's widow for permission to bury her husband in consecrated ground adds to Grimarest's account of Molière's death the fact that he sent to the parish church of St. Eustache for a priest. When two ecclesiastics had in turn refused to confess him, his brother-in-law, Jean Aubry,[2] found a churchman sufficiently liberal to shrive a comedian; but he arrived too late to administer the last sacraments. Molière, however, in the words of the

[1] As Molière's half-sister, Catherine Poquelin, as well as a cousin of his mother's, was a nun, M. Soulié (*Recherches sur Molière*) hints that one of these relations, at least, may have been at the poet's deathbed. This suggestion is refuted by M. Loiseleur (*Les Points obscurs de la vie de Molière*) so far as regards Molière's sister, with the contention that being a nun of the *Couvent des Visitandines*, the cloistral rules of that order would have rendered her visit to Paris impossible.

[2] The husband of Geneviève Béjart and the son of Léonard Aubry the pavier, who endorsed a loan of the ill-starred "Illustrious Theatre."

petition, "died with the feelings of a good Christian manifested in the presence of two nuns and of a gentleman named M. Couthon,[1] in whose arms he expired." La Grange also testifies to the dramatist's Christian death. "Immediately after the play was over," says the preface of 1682, "Molière went home, and no sooner was he in bed than the cough which troubled him perpetually became violent. The efforts he made to suppress it were so great that he burst a vein in the lungs, and, finding himself in that condition, turned all his thoughts to Heaven." Furthermore, Molière's wife states explicitly in her petition to the archbishop that her husband had been shrived at Easter by M. Bernard, a priest of the parish of St. Germain, — certainly sufficient evidence to prove that in spite of his liberal views and hatred of bigots Molière was no unbeliever.

As actors refusing to abandon their profession were denied the right of communion, together with cyprians, usurers, and sorcerers, the priest who confessed Molière at Easter did so in disobedience to the canons of the church. According to Bossuet,[2] "those who played comedy were deprived of the sacraments, while if an actor failed to renounce his calling, his place at the Holy Table was among 'the public sinners,' and a Christian burial was denied him." Regarding Molière's death, the great preacher exclaimed:

Posterity will perhaps know the end of this actor poet who while playing his *Imaginary Invalid*, or his *Physician by Force* (*Médecin par force*), was stricken with the last

[1] Grimarest fails to mention this M. Couthon; but Baron, his informant, probably wished it to appear that he alone attended the poet in his last hour.

[2] *Maximes et rèflexions sur la comédie.*

attack of the malady from which he died a few hours later, going from the laughter of the stage, where he uttered almost his last sigh, to the tribunal of Him who said: "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep."

Such intolerance presents the story of Molière's tragic burial in a comprehensible light. "As soon as he was dead," says Grimarest, "Baron went to St. Germain to inform the King, who was touched by the news and deigned to show it," — apparently a wise procedure, since there was need of Louis' good graces; the vicar of St. Eustache having refused to perform the burial rites because of the dead man's profession. The widow addressed a petition to Harlay de Champvalon, archbishop of Paris, in which she set forth that the priests of the parish had refused to obey the call of a dying man who had received the sacrament at Easter, and begged that a dispensation should be accorded for his burial in the church of St. Eustache; but this plea on behalf of the author of *The Hypocrite* would doubtless have fallen on deaf ears, had not the King plainly shown his wish.

Mme. Molière, it appears, doubtful of the result of her petition, went to St. Germain, and throwing herself at the feet of Louis, complained of "the insult given to the memory of her husband." "In telling the King," says Cizeron Rival,[1] "that if her husband was a criminal his crimes were authorised by his Majesty himself, she paid her court badly." Moreover, she had the additional misfortune of taking with her the vicar of Auteuil "for the purpose of testifying to the good habits of the deceased." Instead of speaking in behalf of Molière, this churchman inopportunely attempted to clear himself

[1] *Récréations littéraires.*

of a charge of Jansenism, — a thoughtless bit of egotism which so angered the King that he dismissed La Molière by telling her that the matter depended entirely upon the ministration of the archbishop.

It is difficult to believe that a woman of her worldly experience could have been so tactless. Indeed, in another version of the affair,[1] Louis is reported to have referred her to the archbishop without this apparent brusqueness. Moreover, the prelate was informed that he must proceed "in a manner calculated to avoid disturbance and scandal," whereupon the interdiction was revoked on condition that the "burial should take place without pomp or noise." According to still another account of the affair,[2] Louis, upon refusal of the vicar of St. Eustache to bury Molière in consecrated ground, asked to what depth it was consecrated, and learning that it was so to a depth of four feet, replied: "Very well, bury him at six feet and let there be no more dispute about it."

Whatever the truth regarding these various versions of Mme. Molière's efforts to obtain Christian burial for her husband, a line in Boileau's *Seventh Epistle* in which he speaks of his dead friend as having been buried in "a bit of earth obtained by supplication," indicates that Louis was appealed to in the matter; for the spirit in which Molière was accorded a burial in consecrated ground shows that the archbishop, if left to his own devices, would have sustained the vicar of St. Eustache. In finally authorising the interment his Grace ordered

[1] Note by Brossette to Verse nineteen of Boileau's *Seventh Epistle* (*Œuvres de* M. *Boileau Despréaux*, 1716).

[2] Quoted by M. Mesnard (*Notice biographique*) from *Le Musée des Monuments français* by Alexandre Lenoir.

that it be accompanied by "no pomp, with only two officiating priests, and that it must be performed after dark, unaccompanied by any service either in the parish of St. Eustache or elsewhere."

Owing to this unseemly controversy, the burial did not take place until four days after Molière's death. On February twenty-first, 1673, at nine o'clock in the evening, the cortège started on its silent journey to the cemetery of St. Joseph, a dependency of the parish of St. Eustache. Bent upon creating a disturbance, a mob had gathered before the dead man's house in the rue Richelieu, and, according to Grimarest, Molière's widow, acting upon the advice of friends, threw a hundred pistoles in gold from her window to mollify the rioters, imploring them meanwhile in a few touching words to pray for her husband's soul.

By the light of a hundred torches the solemn procession moved in silence to the burial ground. To divest it of the taint of stagecraft, the wooden coffin, carried by four bearers, was covered with the pall of the upholsterer's guild. Three priests[1] accompanied the remains, six acolytes bore lighted candles in silver sticks,

[1] These details of Molière's funeral are taken from a letter (apparently anonymous) addressed to *Monsieur Boyvin, prêtre docteur en théologie*, published in 1850 by Benjamin Fillon in his *Considérations historiques et artistiques sur les monnaies de France*. M. Mesnard (*Notice biographique sur Molière*) remarks that the letter, although not signed, is sealed with a wax seal and has every appearance of being authentic. In the matter of the three priests, however, there is a slight discrepancy in this account with the one given by Brossette in his note to Boileau's *Seventh Epistle* (*Œuvres de M. Boileau Despréaux*), wherein he states that the ceremony was performed by "two priests, who accompanied the remains without chanting," — a statement which coincides exactly with the archbishop's proscriptions.

and a number of lackeys flaming torches. As the body was carried through the rue Montmartre, Grimarest asserts that some one asked a woman in the crowd the name of the dead man. "It 's that Molière," she replied derisively; whereat another cried out: "Wretch, he is certainly *monsieur* to you!" When the cemetery was finally reached, Molière was buried in silence at "the foot of the cross," [1] to the light of flaming torches held by devoted friends.

Thus, for the crime of having been an actor, this great Frenchman was hounded to his grave, while Armande Béjart, remorseful for the wrong she had done him, exclaimed far and wide: "What! a sepulture is denied a man worthy of altars?" [2]

This tardily repentant wife married an actor named Guérin and outlived her noted husband twenty-seven years; Esprit-Madeleine, the poet's one surviving child, married a widower named Montalant, many years her senior, and died without issue; so Molière's race is extinct. Soon after his death Lully, his ungrateful collaborator in ballets for the court, obtained, for the opera, the theatre in the Palais Royal; in consequence his comrades were forced to set up their trestles once more in a tennis-court. In the rue Guénegaud his widow and those of his actors who had not deserted to

[1] In 1792 what were thought to be the remains of Molière and La Fontaine were exhumed from the cemetery of St. Joseph; in 1799 they were placed by Alexandre Lenoir in his Museum of French Monuments at the Convent of the Petits Augustins; in 1817 they were entombed in the cemetery of Père La Chaise; while in 1875 the mausoleums of these great Frenchmen were both restored; but M. Mesnard (*Notice biographique*) is of the opinion that they are both cenotaphs.

[2] Note by Brossette to Boileau's *Seventh Epistle* (*Œuvres de M. Boileau Despréaux*).

the Hôtel de Bourgogne continued to play the pieces of the master with indifferent success, until forced by financial losses to unite with the comedians of the Théâtre du Marais; then the Théâtre Guénegaud became the sole rival of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

In 1680 Louis XIV, grown austere from advancing years and the influence of Madame de Maintenon, decided that one theatre was sufficient for the amusement of the citizens of Paris; so by royal decree the companies of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Théâtre Guénegaud were amalgamated. Thus united, the national French theatre, save for a short disruption during the Revolution, has existed to our day. In recognition of its greatest founder, it is known as the House of Molière; for no other age, and no other country, has brought forth a claimant worthy of the throne of comedy Molière left vacant.

APPENDIX

FRENCH ORIGINALS OF VERSES TRANSLATED IN TEXT

P. 23.

Ton Hercule mourant te va rendre immortel;
Au ciel, comme en la terre, il publiera ta gloire,
Et laissant ici-bas un temple à ta mémoire,
Son bûcher servira pour te faire un autel.

Verses by Madeleine Béjart in dedication to Rotrou's Hercule Mourant.

P. 33.

Déjà, dans la troupe royale
Beauchâteau, devenu plus vain,
S'impatiente s'il n'étale
Le présent qu'il a de ta main.
La Béjart, Beys et Molière,
Brillants de pareille lumière,
M'en paroissent plus orgueilleux;
Et depuis cette gloire extrême,
Je n'ose plus m'approcher d'eux
Si ta rare bonté ne me pare de même.

From anonymous collection of poetry printed in 1646.

P. 63.

MASCARILLE

. . . Ce qui me donne un dépit nonpareil,
C'est qu'ici votre amour étrangement s'oublie;
Près de Clélie, il est ainsi que la bouillie,
Qui par un trop grand feu s'enfle, croît jusqu'aux bords,
Et de tous les côtés se répand au dehors.

LÉLIE

Pourroit-on se forcer à plus de retenue ?
Je ne l'ai presque point encore entretenue.

MASCARILLE

Oui, mais ce n'est pas tout que de ne parler pas :
Par vos gestes, durant un moment de repas,
Vous avez aux soupçons donné plus de matière,
Que d'autres ne feroient dans une année entière.

LÉLIE

Et comment donc ?

MASCARILLE

Comment ? chacun a pu le voir.
A table, où Trufaldin l'oblige de se seoir,
Vous n'avez toujours fait qu'avoir les yeux sur elle.
Rouge, tout interdit, jouant de la prunelle,
Sans prendre jamais garde à ce qu'on vous servoit,
Vous n'aviez point de soif qu'alors qu'elle buvoit,
Et dans ses propres mains vous saisissant du verre,
Sans le vouloir rincer, sans rien jeter à terre,
Vous buviez sur son reste, et montriez d'affecter
Le côté qu'à sa bouche elle avoit su porter.

L'Étourdi, Acte IV, scène iv.

P. 74.

Avide observateur, qui voulez tout savoir,
Des ânes de Gignac c'est ici l'abreuvoir.

Histoire des pérégrinations de Molière dans le Languedoc par Emmanuel Raymond.

P. 83.

Marquise, si mon visage
A quelques traits un peu vieux,
Souvenez-vous qu'à mon âge
Vous ne vaudrez guère mieux, etc.

Poésies diverses by Pierre Corneille.

P. 87.

Cet illustre comédien,
Atteignit de son art l'agréable manière.
Il fut le maître de Molière
Et la nature fut le sien.

Quatrain printed beneath a portrait of Scaramouche by Vermeulen.

P. 87.

. . . Par exemple, Élomire
Veut se rendre parfait dans l'art de faire rire;
Que fait-il, le matois, dans ce hardy dessein?
Chez le grand Scaramouche, il va soir et matin.
Là, le miroir en main et ce grand homme en face,
Il n'est contorsion, posture ny grimace
Que ce grand écolier du plus grand des bouffons
Ne fasse et ne refasse en cent et cent façons.

Élomire hypocondre by Boulanger de Chalussay.

P. 90.

Que faut-il encor que je die?
Les violons, la comédie.

Muse historique, April 19, 1659.

P. 112.

Mascarille

Oh, oh! je n'y prenois pas garde:
Tandis que, sans songer à mal, je vous regarde,
Votre œil en tapinois me dérobe mon cœur
Au voleur, au voleur, au voleur, au voleur!

Les Précieuses ridicules, scène ix.

P. 120.

La Femme de Sganarelle

Voilà de nos maris le procédé commun:
Ce qui leur est permis leur devient importun.
Dans les commencements ce sont toutes merveilles;
Ils témoignent pour nous des ardeurs non pareilles;
Mais les traîtres bientôt se lassent de nos feux,

Et portent autre part ce qu'ils doivent chez eux.
Ah! que j'ai de dépit que la loi n'autorise
A changer de mari comme on fait de chemise!

Sganarelle, ou le Cocu imaginaire, scène v.

P. 128.

Savoir *l'École des maris*,
Charme à présent de tout Paris,
Pièce nouvelle et fort prisée
Que sieur *Molier* a composée,
Sujet si riant et si beau,
Qu'il fallut qu'à Fontainebleau
Cette troupe, ayant la pratique
Du sérieux et du comique,
Pour Reines et Roi contenter
L'allât encor représenter.

Loret in Muse historique.

P. 132.

Une Naïade

Fâcheux, retirez-vous, ou s'il faut qu'il vous voie,
Que ce soit seulement pour exciter sa joie.

Les Fâcheux : Prologue.

P. 134.

Nous avons changé de méthode :
Jodelet n'est plus à la mode,
Et maintenant il ne faut pas
Quitter la nature d'un pas.

Letter of La Fontaine to Maucroix.

P. 138.

Voilà l'histoire; que t'en semble?
Crois-tu pas qu'un homme avisé
Voit par là qu'il n'est pas aisé
D'accorder trois femmes ensemble?
Fais-en donc ton profit; surtout
Tiens-toi neutre, et, tout plein d'Homère,
Dis-toi bien qu'en vain l'homme espère

Pouvoir venir jamais à bout
De ce qu'un grand dieu n'a su faire.

Letter of Chapelle to Molière.

P. 139.

ARISTE

. . . Il nous faut en riant instruire la jeunesse,
Reprendre ses défauts avec grande douceur,
Et du nom de vertu ne lui point faire peur.
Mes soins pour Léonor ont suivi ces maximes :
Des moindres libertés je n'ai point fait des crimes,
A ses jeunes désirs j'ai toujours consenti,
Et je ne m'en suis point, grâce au Ciel, repenti.
J'ai souffert qu'elle ait vu les belles compagnies,
Les divertissements, les bals, les comédies ;
Ce sont choses, pour moi, que je tiens de tout temps
Fort propres à former l'esprit des jeunes gens ;
Et l'école du monde, en l'air dont il faut vivre
Instruit mieux, à mon gré, que ne fait aucun livre.
Elle aime à dépenser en habits, linge et nœuds :
Que voulez-vous ? Je tâche à contenter ses vœux ;
Et ce sont des plaisirs qu'on peut, dans nos familles,
Lorsque l'on a du bien, permettre aux jeunes filles.
Un ordre paternel l'oblige à m'épouser ;
Mais mon dessein n'est pas de la tyranniser.
Je sais bien que nos ans ne se rapportent guère,
Et je laisse à son choix liberté tout entière.
Si quatre mille écus de rente bien venants,
Une grande tendresse et des soins complaisants
Peuvent, à son avis, pour un tel mariage,
Réparer entre nous l'inégalité d'âge,
Elle peut m'épouser ; sinon, choisir ailleurs.

L'École des maris, Acte I, scène ii.

P. 153.

DONE ELVIRE

L'hymen ne peut nous joindre, et j'abhorre des nœuds
Qui deviendroient sans doute un enfer pour tous deux.

Don Garcie de Navarre, Acte I, scène i.

P. 158.

ARNOLPHE

Épouser une sotte est pour n'être sot.
Je crois, en bon chrétien, votre moitié fort sage;
Mais une femme habile est un mauvais présage;
Et je sais ce qu'il coûte à de certaines gens
Pour avoir pris les leurs avec trop de talens.
Moi, j'irois me charger d'une spirituelle
Qui ne parleroit rien que cercle et que ruelle,
Qui de prose et de vers feroit de doux écrits,
Et que visiteroient marquis et beaux esprits,
Tandis que, sous le nom du mari de Madame,
Je serois comme un saint que pas un ne réclame?
Non, non, je ne veux point d'un esprit qui soit haut;
Et femme qui compose en sait plus qu'il ne faut.
Je prétends que la mienne, en clartés peu sublime,
Même ne sache pas ce que c'est qu'une rime;
Et s'il faut qu'avec elle on joue au corbillon
Et qu'on vienne à lui dire à son tour: "Qu'y met-on?"
Je veux qu'elle réponde: "Une tarte à la crême";
En un mot, qu'elle soit d'une ignorance extrême;
Et c'est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler,
De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer, coudre et filer.

L'École des femmes, Acte I, scène i.

P. 159.

ARNOLPHE

Dans un petit couvent, loin de toute pratique,
Je la fis élever selon ma politique;
C'est-à-dire ordonnant quels soins on emploîroit
Pour la rendre idiote autant qu'il se pourroit.
Dieu merci, le succès a suivi mon attente;
Et grande, je l'ai vue à tel point innocente,
Que j'ai béni le Ciel d'avoir trouvé mon fait,
Pour me faire une femme au gré de mon souhait.

L'École des femmes, Acte I, scène i.

P. 161.

ARNOLPHE

Pourquoi ne m'aimer pas, Madame l'impudente?

AGNÈS

Mon Dieu, ce n'est pas moi que vous devez blâmer :
Que ne vous êtes-vous, comme lui, fait aimer ?
Je ne vous en ai pas empêché, que je pense.

ARNOLPHE

Je m'y suis efforcé de toute ma puissance ;
Mais les soins que j'ai pris, je les ai perdus tous.

AGNÈS

Vraiment, il en sait donc là-dessus plus que vous ;
Car à se faire aimer il n'a point eu de peine.

L'École des femmes, Acte V, scène iv.

P. 161.

ARNOLPHE

Écoute seulement ce soupir amoureux,
Vois ce regard mourant, contemple ma personne,
Et quitte ce morveux et l'amour qu'il te donne.
C'est quelque sort qu'il faut qu'il ait jeté sur toi,
Et tu seras cent fois plus heureuse avec moi.
Ta forte passion est d'être brave et leste :
Tu le seras toujours, va, je te le proteste ;
Sans cesse, nuit et jour, je te caresserai,
Je te bouchonnerai, baiserai, mangerai ;
Tout comme tu voudras, tu pourras te conduire :
Je ne m'explique point, et cela, c'est tout dire.
(*A part.*) Jusqu'où la passion peut-elle faire aller !
Enfin à mon amour rien ne peut s'égaler :
Quelle preuve veux-tu que je t'en donne, ingrate ?
Me veux-tu voir pleurer ? Veux-tu que je me batte ?
Veux-tu que je m'arrache un côté dé cheveux ?
Veux-tu que je me tue ? Oui, dis si tu le veux :
Je suis tout prêt, cruelle, à te prouver ma flamme.

L'École des femmes, Acte V, scène iv.

P. 164.

CHRYSALDE

Vous pensez vous moquer ; mais, à ne vous rien feindre,
Dans le monde je vois cent choses plus à craindre

Et dont je me ferois un bien plus grand malheur
Que de cet accident qui vous fait tant de peur.
Pensez-vous qu'à choisir de deux choses prescrites,
Je n'aimasse pas mieux être ce que vous dites,
Que de me voir mari de ces femmes de bien,
Dont la mauvaise humeur fait un procès sur rien,
Ces dragons de vertu, ces honnêtes diablesses,
Se retranchant toujours sur leurs sages prouesses,
Qui, pour un petit tort qu'elles ne nous font pas,
Prennent droit de traiter les gens de haut en bas,
Et veulent, sur le pied de nous être fidèles,
Que nous soyons tenus à tout endurer d'elles?
Encore un coup, compère, apprenez qu'en effet
Le cocuage n'est que ce que l'on le fait,
Qu'on peut souhaiter pour de certaines causes,
Et qu'il a ses plaisirs comme les autres choses.

L'École des femmes, Acte IV, scène viii.

P. 164.

ALAIN

La femme est en effet le potage de l'homme;
Et quand un homme voit d'autres hommes parfois
Qui veulent dans sa soupe aller tremper leurs doigts,
Il en montre aussitôt une colère extrême.

L'École des femmes, Acte II, scène iii.

P. 165.

ARNOLPHE

Je sais les tours rusés et les subtiles trames
Dont pour nous en planter, savent user les femmes,
Et comme on est dupé par leurs dextérités.

L'École des femmes, Acte I, scène i.

P. 165.

ARNOLPHE

Quoi? j'aurai dirigé son éducation
Avec tant de tendresse et de précaution,
Je l'aurai fait passer chez moi dès son enfance,
Et j'en aurai chéri la plus tendre espérance;
Mon cœur aura bâti sur ses attraits naissans
Et cru la mitonner pour moi durant treize ans,

Afin qu'un jeune fou dont elle s'amourache
Me la vienne enlever jusque sur la moustache,
Lorsqu'elle est avec moi mariée à demi!
Non, parbleu! non, parbleu!

L'École des femmes, Acte IV, scène i.

P. 166.

ARNOLPHE

Ce mot et ce regard désarme ma colère,
Et produit un retour de tendresse et de cœur,
Qui de son action m'efface la noirceur.
Chose étrange d'aimer, et que pour ces traîtresses
Les hommes soient sujets à de telles foiblesses!
Tout le monde connoît leur imperfection:
Ce n'est qu'extravagance et qu'indiscrétion;
Leur esprit est méchant, et leur âme fragile;
Il n'est rien de plus foible et de plus imbécile,
Rien de plus infidèle: et malgré tout cela,
Dans le monde on fait tout pour ces animaux-là.
Hé bien! faisons la paix. Va, petite traîtresse,
Je te pardonne tout et te rends ma tendresse.
Considère par là l'amour que j'ai pour toi,
Et me voyant si bon, en revanche aime-moi.

L'École des femmes, Acte V, scène iv.

P. 167.

III MAXIME

Loin ces études d'œillades,
Ces eaux, ces blancs, ces pommades,
Et mille ingrédients qui font des teints fleuris:
A l'honneur, tous les jours, ce sont drogues mortelles;
Et les soins de paroître belles
Se prennent peu pour les maris.

IV MAXIME

Sous sa coiffe, en sortant, comme l'honneur l'ordonne,
Il faut que de ses yeux elle étouffe les coups;
Car, pour bien plaire à son époux,
Elle ne doit plaire à personne.

L'École des femmes, Acte III, scène ii.

P. 169.

Pièce qu'en plusieurs lieux on fronde,
Mais où pourtant va tant de monde,
Que jamais sujet important
Pour le voir n'en attira tant.

Loret in Muse historique.

P. 169.

Laisse gronder tes envieux:
Ils ont beau crier en tous lieux
Qu'en vain tu charmes le vulgaire,
Que tes vers n'ont rien de plaisant;
Si tu ne savois un peu moins plaire,
Tu ne leur déplairois pas tant.

Boileau: Stanzas to Molière.

P. 184.

Mais les grands princes n'aiment guères
Que les compliments qui sont courts;
Et le nôtre surtout a bien d'autres affaires
Que d'écouter tous vos discours.
La louange et l'encens n'est pas ce qui le touche;
Dès que vous ouvrirez la bouche
Pour lui parler de grâce et de bienfait,
Il comprendra d'abord ce que vous voudrez dire,
Et se mettant doucement à sourire
D'un air qui sur les cœurs fait un charmant effet,
Il passera comme un trait,
Et cela vous doit suffire:
Voilà votre compliment fait.

Remercîment au Roi.

P. 203.

DORINE

Mais il est devenu comme un homme hébété
Depuis que de Tartuffe on le voit entêté;
Il l'appelle son frère, et l'aime dans son âme
Cent fois plus qu'il ne fait mère, fils, fille, et femme.
C'est de tous ses secrets l'unique confident,
Et de ses actions le directeur prudent;
Il le choie, il l'embrasse; et pour une maîtresse

On ne sauroit, je pense, avoir plus de tendresse :
À table, au plus haut bout il veut qu'il soit assis ;
Avec joie il l'y voit manger autant que six ;
Les bons morceaux de tout, il faut qu'on les lui cède ;
Et, s'il vient à roter, il lui dit : " Dieu vous aide."
Enfin il en est fou ; c'est son tout, son héros ;
Il l'admire à tous coups, le cite à tous propos ;
Ses moindres actions lui semblent des miracles,
Et tous les mots qu'il dit sont pour lui des oracles.
Lui, qui connoit sa dupe, et qui veut en jouir,
Par cent dehors fardés a l'art de l'éblouir ;
Son cagotisme en tire à toute heure des sommes.
Et prend droit de gloser sur tous tant que nous sommes.

Le Tartuffe, Acte I, scène ii.

P. 205.

ORGON

Mon frère, vous seriez charmé de le connoître ;
Et vos ravissements ne prendroient point de fin.
C'est un homme ... qui ... ha ! ... un homme ... un homme enfin
Qui suit bien ses leçons, goûte une paix profonde,
Et comme du fumier regarde tout le monde.
Oui, je deviens tout autre avec son entretien ;
Il m'enseigne à n'avoir affection pour rien ;
De toutes amitiés il détache mon âme ;
Et je verrois mourir frère, enfants, mère, et femme,
Que je m'en soucierois autant que de cela.

CLÉANTE

Les sentiments humains, mon frère, que voilà !

ORGON

Ah ! si vous aviez vu comme j'en fis rencontre,
Vous auriez pris pour lui l'amitié que je montre.
Chaque jour à l'église il venoit, d'un air doux,
Tout vis-à-vis de moi se mettre à deux genoux.
Il attiroit les yeux de l'assemblée entière
Par l'ardeur dont au ciel il poussoit sa prière ;

Il faisoit des soupirs, de grands élancements,
Et baisoit humblement la terre à tous moments :
Et lorsque je sortois, il me devançoit vite
Pour m'aller, à la porte, offrir de l'eau bénite.
Instruit par son garçon, qui dans tout l'imitoit,
Et de son indigence, et de ce qu'il étoit,
Je lui faisois des dons ; mais, avec modestie,
Il me vouloit toujours en rendre une partie.
C'est trop, me disoit-il, *c'est trop de la moitié ;*
Je ne mérite pas de vous faire pitié.
Et quand je refusois de le vouloir reprendre,
Aux pauvres, à mes yeux, il alloit le répandre.
Enfin le Ciel chez moi me le fit retirer
Et depuis ce temps-là tout semble y prospérer.
Je vois qu'il reprend tout, et qu'à ma femme même
Il prend pour mon honneur, un intérêt extrême ;
Il m'avertit des gens qui lui font les yeux doux,
Et plus que moi six fois il s'en montre jaloux.
Mais vous ne croiriez point jusqu'où monte son zèle :
Il s'impute à péché la moindre bagatelle ;
Un rien presque suffit pour le scandaliser,
Jusque-là qu'il se vint l'autre jour accuser
D'avoir pris une puce en faisant sa prière,
Et de l'avoir tuée avec trop de colère.

Le Tartuffe, Acte I, scène v.

P. 206.

CLÉANTE

Il est de faux dévots que de faux braves :
Et, comme on ne voit pas qu'où l'honneur les conduit
Les vrais braves soient ceux qui font beaucoup de bruit,
Les bons et vrais dévots, qu'on doit suivre à la trace,
Ne sont pas ceux aussi qui font tant de grimace.

Le Tartuffe, Acte I, scène v.

P. 206.

ORGON

Enfin, ma fille, il faut payer d'obéissance ;
Et montrer pour mon choix entière déférence

Le Tartuffe, Acte II, scène ii.

P. 207.

MARIANE

Un père, je l'avoue, a sur nous tant d'empire,
Que je n'ai jamais eu la force de rien dire.

Le Tartuffe, Acte II, scène iii.

P. 207.

MARIANE

Je ne vous reponds pas des volontés d'un père;
Mais je ne serai point à d'autre qu'à Valère.

Le Tartuffe, Acte II, scène iv.

P. 208.

TARTUFFE

Laurent, serrez ma haire avec ma discipline,
Et priez que toujours le ciel vous illumine.
Si l'on vient pour me voir, je vais aux prisonniers,
Des aumônes que j'ai, partager les deniers.

Le Tartuffe, Acte III, scène ii.

P. 208.

ELMIRE

Pour moi, je crois qu'au ciel tendent tous vos soupirs,
Et que rien ici-bas n'arrête vos désirs.

TARTUFFE

L'amour qui nous attache aux beautés éternelles
N'étouffe pas en nous l'amour des temporelles:
Nos sens facilement peuvent être charmés
Des ouvrages parfaits que le ciel a formés
Ses attraits réflechis brillent dans vos pareilles;
Mais il étale en vous ses plus rares merveilles:
Il a sur votre face épanché des beautés
Dont les yeux sont surpris, et les cœurs transportés;
Et je n'ai pu vous voir, parfaite créature,
Sans admirer en vous l'auteur de la nature,
Et d'une ardente amour sentir mon cœur atteint,
Au plus beau des portraits où lui-même il s'est peint.
D'abord j'appréhendai que cette ardeur secrète
Ne fût du noir esprit une surprise adroite;
Et même à fuir vos yeux mon cœur se résolut,

Vous croyant un obstacle à faire mon salut.
Mais enfin je connus, ô beauté tout aimable,
Que cette passion peut n'être point coupable,
Que je puis l'ajuster avecque la pudeur,
Et c'est ce qui m'y fait abandonner mon cœur.
Ce m'est, je le confesse, une audace bien grande
Que d'oser de ce cœur vous adresser l'offrande;
Mais j'attends en mes vœux tout de votre bonté,
Et rien des vains efforts de mon infirmité.
En vous est mon espoir, mon bien, ma quiétude;
De vous dépend ma peine ou ma béatitude;
Et je vais être enfin, par votre seul arrêt,
Heureux, si vous voulez; malheureux, s'il vous plaît.

ELMIRE

La déclaration est tout à fait galante;
Mais elle est, à vrai dire, un peu bien surprenante.
Vous deviez, ce me semble, armer mieux votre sein,
Et raisonner un peu sur un pareil dessein.
Un dévot comme vous, et que partout on nomme . . .

TARTUFFE

Ah! pour être dévot, je n'en suis pas moins homme:
Et, lorsqu'on vient à voir vos célestes appas,
Un cœur se laisse prendre, et ne raisonne pas.
Je sais qu'un tel discours de moi paroît étrange:
Mais, madame, après tout, je ne suis pas un ange;
Et, si vous condamnez l'aveu que je vous fais,
Vous devez vous en prendre à vos charmants attraits
Dès que j'en vis briller la splendeur plus qu'humaine,
De mon intérieur vous fûtes souveraine;
De vos regards divins l'ineffable douceur
Força la résistance où s'obstinoit mon cœur;
Elle surmonta tout, jeûnes, prières, larmes,
Et tourna tous mes vœux du côté de vos charmes.
Mes yeux et mes soupirs vous l'ont dit mille fois;
Et, pour mieux m'expliquer, j'emploie ici la voix.
Que si vous contemplez, d'une âme un peu bénigne,

Les tribulations de votre esclave indigne;
S'il faut que vos bontés veuillent me consoler,
Et jusqu'à mon néant daignent se ravaler,
J'aurai toujours pour vous, ô suave merveille,
Une dévotion à nulle autre pareille.
Votre honneur avec moi ne court point de hasard,
Et n'a nulle disgrâce à craindre de ma part.
Tous ces galants de cour, dont les femmes sont folles,
Sont bruyants dans leurs faits et vains dans leurs paroles;
De leurs progrès sans cesse on les voit se targuer;
Ils n'ont point de faveurs qu'ils n'aillent divulger;
Et leur langue indiscrète, en qui l'on se confie,
Déshonore l'autel où leur cœur sacrifie.
Mais les gens comme nous brûlent d'un feu discret,
Avec qui, pour toujours, on est sûr du secret.
Le soin que nous prenons de notre renommée
Répond de toute chose à la personne aimée;
Et c'est en nous qu'on trouve, acceptant notre cœur,
De l'amour sans scandale, et du plaisir sans peur.

Le Tartuffe, Acte III, scène iii.

P. 211.

TARTUFFE.

Oui, mon frère, je suis un méchant, un coupable,
Un malheureux pécheur, tout plein d'iniquité,
Le plus grand scélérat qui jamais ait été.
Chaque instant de ma vie est chargé de souillures;
Elle n'est qu'un amas de crimes et d'ordures;
Et je vois que le ciel, pour ma punition,
Me veut mortifier en cette occasion.
De quelque grand forfait qu'on me puisse reprendre,
Je n'ai garde d'avoir l'orgueil de m'en défendre.
Croyez ce qu'on vous dit, armez votre courroux,
Et comme un criminel chassez-moi de chez vous;
Je ne saurois avoir tant de honte en partage,
Que je n'en aie encore mérité davantage.

Le Tartuffe, Acte III, scène vi.

P. 212.

L' Exempt

Nous vivons sous un prince ennemi de la fraude,
Un prince dont les yeux se font jour dans les cœurs,
Et que ne peut tromper tout l'art des imposteurs.
D'un fin discernement sa grande âme pourvue
Sur les choses toujours jette une droite vue;
Chez elle jamais rien ne surprend trop d'accès,
Et sa ferme raison ne tombe en nul excès.
Il donne aux gens de bien une gloire immortelle;
Mais sans aveuglement il fait briller ce zèle,
Et l'amour pour les vrais ne ferme point son cœur
A tout ce que les faux doivent donner d'horreur.

Le Tartuffe, Acte V, scène dernière.

P. 213.

Tartuffe

Je puis vous dissiper ces craintes ridicules,
Madame, et je sais l'art de lever les scrupules.
Le ciel défend, de vrai, certains contentements;
Mais on trouve avec lui des accommodements.
Selon divers besoins, il est une science
D'étendre les liens de notre conscience,
Et de rectifier le mal de l'action
Avec la pureté de notre intention.
De ces secrets, madame, on saura vous instruire;
Vous n'avez seulement qu'à vous laisser conduire.
Contentez mon désir, et n'ayez point d'effroi;
Je vous réponds de tout, et prends le mal sur moi.

Le Tartuffe, Acte IV, scène v.

P. 216.

Cléante

Que ces francs charlatans, que ces dévots de place,
De qui la sacrilège et trompeuse grimace,
Abuse impunément, et se joue, à leur gré
De ce qu'ont les mortels de plus saint et sacré;
Ces gens qui, par une âme à l'intérêt soumise,
Font de dévotion métier et marchandise,
Et veulent acheter crédit et dignités.

Le Tartuffe, Acte I, scène v.

P. 258.

ALCESTE

Non, je ne puis souffrir cette lâche méthode
Qu'affectent la plupart de vos gens à la mode ;
Et je ne hais rien tant que les contorsions
De tous ces grands faiseurs de protestations,
Ces affables donneurs d'embrassades frivoles,
Ces obligeants diseurs d'inutiles paroles,
Qui de civilités avec tous font combat,
Et traitent du même air l'honnête homme et le fat.
Quel avantage a-t-on qu'un homme vous caresse,
Vous jure amitié, foi, zèle, estime, tendresse,
Et vous fasse de vous un éloge éclatant,
Lorsque au premier faquin il court en faire autant ?
Non, non, il n'est point d'âme un peu bien située
Qui veuille d'une estime ainsi prostituée ;
Et la plus glorieuse a des régals peu chers,
Dès qu'on voit qu'on nous mêle avec tout l'univers :
Sur quelque préférence une estime se fonde,
Et c'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde.
Puisque vous y donnez, dans ces vices du temps,
Morbleu ! vous n'êtes pas pour être de mes gens ;
Je refuse d'un cœur la vaste complaisance
Qui ne fait de mérite aucune différence ;
Je veux qu'on me distingue ; et, pour le trancher net,
L'ami du genre humain n'est point du tout mon fait.

Le Misanthrope, Acte I, scène i.

P. 259.

ALCESTE

Non : elle est générale, et je hais tous les hommes :
Les uns, parce qu'ils sont méchants et malfaisants,
Et les autres, pour être aux méchants complaisants,
Et n'avoir pas pour eux ces haines vigoureuses
Que doit donner le vice aux âmes vertueuses.

. . . . . .

Têtebleu ! ce me sont de mortelles blessures,
De voir qu'avec le vice on garde des mesures ;

Et parfois il me prend des mouvements soudains
De fuir dans un désert l'approche des humains.

PHILINTE

Mon Dieu, des mœurs du temps mettons-nous moins en peine,
Et faisons un peu grâce à la nature humaine ;
Ne l'examinons point dans la grande rigueur,
Et voyons ses défauts avec quelque douceur.
Il faut, parmi le monde, une vertu traitable ;
A force de sagesse, on peut être blâmable ;
La parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité,
Et veut que l'on soit sage avec sobriété.
Cette grande roideur des vertues des vieux âges
Heurte trop notre siècle et les communs usages ;
Elle veut aux mortels trop de perfection :
Il faut fléchir au temps sans obstination ;
Et c'est une folie à nulle autre seconde
De vouloir se mêler de corriger le monde.

Le Misanthrop , Acte I, scène i.

P. 260

PHILINTE

Mais cette rectitude
Que vous voulez en tout avec exactitude,
Cette pleine droiture, où vous vous renfermez,
La trouvez-vous ici dans ce que vous aimez ?
Je m'étonne, pour moi, qu'étant, comme il le semble,
Vous et le genre humain si fort brouillés ensemble,
Malgré tout ce qui peut vous le rendre odieux,
Vous avez pris chez lui ce qui charme vos yeux ;
Et ce qui me surprend encore davantage,
C'est cet étrange choix où votre cœur s'engage.
La sincère Éliante a du penchant pour vous,
La prude Arsinoé vous voit d'un œil fort doux ;
Cependant à leurs vœux votre âme se refuse,
Tandis qu'en ses liens Célimène l'amuse,
De qui l'humeur coquette et l'esprit médisant
Semble si fort donner dans les mœurs d'à présent.
D'où vient que, leur portant une haine mortelle,

Vous pouvez bien souffrir ce qu'en tient cette belle ?
Ne sont-ce plus défauts dans un objet si doux ?
Ne les voyez-vous pas ? ou les excusez-vous ?

ALCESTE

Non, l'amour que je sens pour cette jeune veuve
Ne ferme point mes yeux aux défauts qu'on lui treuve,
Et je suis, quelque ardeur qu'elle m'ait pu donner,
Le premier à les voir, comme à les condamner.
Mais, avec tout cela, quoi que je puisse faire,
Je confesse mon foible ; elle a l'art de me plaire :
J'ai beau voir ses défauts, et j'ai beau l'en blâmer,
En dépit qu'on en ait, elle se fait aimer ;
Sa grâce est la plus forte ; et sans doute ma flamme
De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme.

Le Misanthrope, Acte I, scène i.

P. 261.

ALCESTE

Il est vrai : ma raison me le dit chaque jour ;
Mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour.

Le Misanthrope, Acte I, scène i.

P. 262.

ALCESTE

Si le Roi m'avoit donné
Paris, sa grand'ville,
Et qu'il me fallût quitter
L'amour de ma mie,
Je dirois au roi Henri :
" Reprenez votre Paris :
J'aime mieux ma mie, au gué !
J'aime mieux ma mie."

Le Misanthrope, Acte I, scène ii.

P. 263.

ALCESTE

J'en pourrois, par malheur, faire d'aussi méchants ;
Mais je me garderois de les montrer aux gens.

Le Misanthrope, Acte I, scène ii.

P. 263.

CÉLIMÈNE

Des amants que je fais me rendez-vous coupable ?
Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable ?
Et lorsque pour me voir ils font de doux efforts,
Dois-je prendre un bâton pour les mettre dehors ?

ALCESTE

Non, ce n'est pas, Madame, un bâton qu'il faut prendre,
Mais un cœur à leur vœux moins facile et moins tendre.
Je sais que vos appas vous suivent en tous lieux ;
Mais votre accueil retient ceux qu'attirent vos yeux ;
Et sa douceur offerte à qui vous rend les armes
Achève sur les cœurs l'ouvrage de vos charmes.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scene i.

P. 264.

ALCESTE

Mais moi, que vous blâmez de trop de jalousie,
Qu'ai-je de plus qu'eux tous, Madame, je vous prie ?

CÉLIMÈNE

Le bonheur de savoir que vous êtes aimé.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène i.

P. 264.

ALCESTE

Morbleu ! faut-il que je vous aime ?
Ah ! si de vos mains je rattrape mon cœur,
Je bénirai le Ciel de ce rare bonheur !
Je ne le cèle pas, je fais tout mon possible
À rompre de ce cœur l'attachement terrible ;
Mais mes plus grands efforts n'ont rien fait jusqu'ici.
Et c'est pour mes péchés que je vous aime ainsi.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène i.

P. 265.

CÉLIMÈNE

O l'ennuyeux conteur !
Jamais on ne le voit sortir du grand seigneur ;
Dans le brillant commerce il se mêle sans cesse,

Et ne cite jamais que duc, prince, ou princesse :
La qualité l'entête ; et tous ses entretiens
Ne sont que de chevaux, d'équipage et de chiens ;
Il tutaye en parlant ceux du plus haut étage,
Et le nom de Monsieur est chez lui hors d'usage.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène iv.

P. 265.

CLITANDRE

Mais le jeune Cléon, chez qui vont aujourd'hui
Nos plus honnêtes gens, que dites-vous de lui ?

CELIMÈNE

Que de son cuisinier il s'est fait un mérite,
Et que c'est à sa table à qui l'on rend visite.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène iv.

P. 265.

ALCESTE

Allons, ferme, poussez, mes bons amis de cour ;
Vous n'en épargnez point, et chacun a son tour :
Cependant aucun d'eux à vos yeux ne se montre,
Qu'on ne vous voie, en hâte, aller à sa rencontre,
Lui présenter la main, et d'un baiser flatteur
Appuyer les serments d'être son serviteur.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène iv.

P. 266.

ÉLIANTE

L'amour, pour l'ordinaire, est peu fait à ces lois,
Et l'on voit les amants vanter toujours leur choix ;
Jamais leur passion n'y voit rien de blâmable,
Et dans l'objet aimé tout leur devient aimable :
Ils comptent les défauts pour des perfections,
Et savent y donner de favorables noms.
La pâle est aux jasmins en blancheur comparable ;
La noire à faire peur, une brune adorable ;
La maigre a de la taille et de la liberté ;
La grasse est dans son port pleine de majesté ;
La malpropre sur soi, de peu d'attraits chargée,
Est mise sous le nom de beauté négligée ;

La géante paroît une déesse aux yeux ;
La naine, un abrégé des merveilles des cieux ;
L'orgueilleuse a le cœur digne d'une couronne ;
La fourbe a de l'esprit ; la sotte est toute bonne ;
La trop grande parleuse est d'agréable humeur ;
Et la muette garde une honnête pudeur.
C'est ainsi qu'un amant dont l'ardeur est extrême
Aime jusqu'aux défauts des personnes qu'il aime.

Le Misanthrope, Acte II, scène iv.

P. 267.

CÉLIMÈNE

Oui, oui, franche grimace :
Dans l'âme elle est du monde, et ses soins tentent tout
Pour accrocher quelqu'un, sans en venir à bout.
Elle ne sauroit voir qu'avec un œil d'envie
Les amants déclarés dont une autre est suivie ;
Et son triste mérite, abandonné de tous,
Contre le siècle aveugle est toujours en courroux.
Elle tâche à couvrir d'un faux voile de prude
Ce que chez elle on voit d'affreuse solitude ;
Et pour sauver l'honneur de ses foibles appas,
Elle attache du crime au pouvoir qu'ils n'ont pas.
Cependant un amant plairoit fort à la dame,
Et même pour Alceste, elle a tendresse d'âme. . . .

Le Misanthrope, Acte III, scène iii.

P. 267.

CÉLIMÈNE

Madame, on peut, je crois, louer et blâmer tout,
Et chacun a raison, suivant l'âge ou le goût.
Il est une saison pour la galanterie ;
Il en est une aussi propre à la pruderie.
On peut, par politique, en prendre le parti,
Quand de nos jeunes ans l'éclat est amorti :
Cela sert à couvrir de fâcheuses disgrâces.
Je ne dis pas qu'un jour je ne suive vos traces :
L'âge amènera tout, et ce n'est pas le temps,
Madame, comme on sait, d'être prude à vingt ans.

Le Misanthrope, Acte III, scène iv.

P. 269.

ALCESTE

Ciel ! rien de plus cruel peut-il être inventé ?
Et jamais cœur fut-il de la sorte traité ?
Quoi ? d'un juste courroux je suis ému contre elle,
C'est moi qui me viens plaindre, et c'est moi qu'on querelle !
On pousse ma douleur et mes soupçons à bout,
On me laisse tout croire, on fait gloire de tout ;
Et cependant mon cœur est encore assez lâche
Pour ne pouvoir briser la chaîne qui l'attache,
Et pour ne pas s'armer d'un généreux mépris
Contre l'ingrat objet dont il est trop épris !
Ah ! que vous savez bien ici, contre moi-même,
Perfide, vous servir de ma foiblesse extrême,
Et ménager pour vous l'excès prodigieux
De ce fatal amour né de vos traîtres yeux !
Défendez-vous au moins d'un crime qui m'accable,
Et cessez d'affecter d'être envers moi coupable ;
Rendez-moi, s'il se peut, ce billet innocent :
A vous prêter les mains, ma tendresse consent ;
Efforcez-vous ici de paroître fidèle,
Et je m'efforcerai, moi, de vous croire telle.

CÉLIMÈNE

Allez, vous êtes fou, dans vos transports jaloux,
Et ne méritez pas l'amour qu'on a pour vous.
Je voudrois bien savoir qui pourroit me contraindre
À descendre pour vous aux bassesses de feindre,
Et pourquoi, si mon cœur penchoit d'autre côté,
Je ne le dirois pas avec sincérité.
Quoi ? de mes sentiments l'obligeante assurance
Contre tous vos soupçons ne prend pas ma défense ?
Auprès d'un tel garant, sont-ils de quelque poids ?
N'est-ce pas m'outrager que d'écouter leur voix ?
Et puisque notre cœur fait un effort extrême
Lorsqu'il peut se résoudre à confesser qu'il aime,

Puisque l'honneur du sexe, ennemi de nos feux,
S'oppose fortement à de pareils aveux,
L'amant qui voit pour lui franchir un tel obstacle
Doit-il impunément douter de cet oracle ?
Et n'est-il pas coupable en ne s'assurant pas
A ce qu'on ne dit point qu'après de grands combats ?
Allez, de tels soupçons méritent ma colère,
Et vous ne valez pas que l'on vous considère :
Je suis sotte, et veux mal à ma simplicité
De conserver encor pour vous quelque bonté ;
Je devrois autre part attacher mon estime,
Et vous faire un sujet de plainte légitime.

ALCESTE

Ah ! traîtresse, mon foible est étrange pour vous !
Vous me trompez sans doute avec des mots si doux ;
Mais il n'importe, il faut suivre ma destinée :
À votre foi mon âme est toute abandonée ;
Je veux voir, jusqu'au bout, quel sera votre cœur,
Et si de me trahir il aura la noirceur.

CÉLIMÈNE

Non, vous ne m'aimez point comme il faut que l'on aime.

ALCESTE

Ah ! rien n'est comparable à mon amour extrême ;
Et dans l'ardeur qu'il a de se montrer à tous,
Il va jusqu'à former des souhaits contre vous.
Oui, je voudrais qu'aucun ne vous trouvât aimable,
Que vous fussiez réduite en un sort misérable,
Que le Ciel, en naissant, ne vous eût donné rien,
Que vous n'eussiez ni rang, ni naissance, ni bien,
Afin que de mon cœur l'éclatant sacrifice
Vous pût d'un pareil sort réparer l'injustice,
Et que j'eusse la joie et la gloire, en ce jour,
De vous voir tenir tout des mains de mon amour.

CÉLIMÈNE

C'est me vouloir du bien d'une étrange manière!
Me préserve le Ciel que vous ayez matière . . .!

Le Misanthrope, Acte IV, scène iii.

P. 271.

ALCESTE

Il semble que le sort, quelque soin que je prenne,
Ait juré d'empêcher que je vous entretienne;
Mais pour en triompher, souffrez à mon amour
De vous revoir, Madame, avant la fin du jour.

Le Misanthrope, Acte IV, scène iv.

P. 272.

CÉLIMÈNE

Oui, vous pouvez tout dire:
Vous en êtes en droit, lorsque vous vous plaindrez,
Et de me reprocher tout ce que vous voudrez.
J'ai tort, je le confesse, et mon âme confuse
Ne cherche à vous payer d'aucune vaine excuse.
J'ai des autres ici méprisé le courroux,
Mais je tombe d'accord de mon crime envers vous.
Votre ressentiment, sans doute, est raisonnable:
Je sais combien je dois vous paroître coupable,
Que toute chose dit que j'ai pu vous trahir,
Et qu'enfin vous avez sujet de me haïr.
Faites-le, j'y consens.

ALCESTE

Hé! le puis-je, traîtresse?
Puis-je ainsi triompher de toute ma tendresse?
Et quoique avec ardeur je veuille vous haïr,
Trouvé-je un cœur en moi tout prêt à m'obéir?

(*À Éliante et Philinte.*)

Vous voyez ce que peut une indigne tendresse,
Et je vous fais tous deux témoins de ma foiblesse.
Mais, à vous dire vrai, ce n'est pas encor tout,
Et vous allez me voir la pousser jusqu'au bout,
Montrer que c'est à tort que sages on nous nomme,

Et que dans tous les cœurs il est toujours de l'homme.
Oui, je veux bien, perfide, oublier vos forfaits ;
J'en saurai, dans mon âme, excuser tous les traits,
Et me les couvrirai du nom d'une foiblesse
Où le vice du temps porte votre jeunesse,
Pourvu que votre cœur veuille donner les mains
Au dessein que j'ai fait de fuir tous les humains,
Et que dans mon désert, où j'ai fait vœu de vivre,
Vous soyez, sans tarder, résolue à me suivre :
C'est par là seulement que, dans tous les esprits,
Vous pouvez réparer le mal de vos écrits,
Et qu'après cet éclat, qu'un noble cœur abhorre,
Il peut m'être permis de vous aimer encore.

CÉLIMÈNE

Moi, renoncer au monde avant que de vieillir,
Et dans votre désert aller m'ensevelir !

ALCESTE

Et s'il faut qu'à mes feux votre flamme réponde,
Que vous doit importer tout le reste du monde ?
Vos désirs avec moi ne sont-ils pas contents ?

CÉLIMÈNE

La solitude effraye une âme de vingt ans :
Je ne sens point la mienne assez grande, assez forte,
Pour me résoudre à prendre un dessein de la sorte.
Si le don de ma main peut contenter vos vœux,
Je pourrai me résoudre à serrer de tels nœuds ;
Et l'hymen . . .

ALCESTE

Non : mon cœur à présent vous déteste,
Et ce refus lui seul fait plus que tout le reste.
Puisque vous n'êtes point, en des liens si doux,
Pour trouver tout en moi, comme moi tout en vous,
Allez, je vous refuse, et ce sensible outrage
De vos indignes fers pour jamais me dégage.

Le Misanthrope, Acte V, scène dernière.

P. 274.

ALCESTE

Puissiez-vous, pour goûter de vrais contentements,
L'un pour l'autre à jamais garder ces sentiments!
Trahi de toutes parts, accablé d'injustices,
Je vais sortir d'un gouffre où triomphent les vices,
Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté
Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté.

Le Misanthrope, Acte V, scène dernière.

P. 284.

Affecter un air pédantesque,
Cracher du grec et du latin,
Longue perruque, habit grotesque,
De la fourrure et du satin,
Tout cela réuni fait presque
Ce qu'on appelle un médecin.

Les Médecins au temps de Molière,
Maurice Raynaud, page 81.

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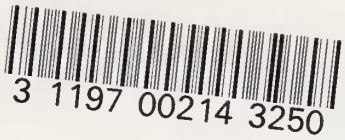
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